A Nineteenth-Century Miracle

Louis Zangwill

CHATTO & WINDUS

A Nineteenth-Century Miracle

Louis Zangwill

A NINETEENTH-CENTURY MIRACLE

OPINIONS OF THE PRESS

ON

A NINETEENTH-CENTURY MIRACLE

'The book may be confidently recommended.'—*Saturday Review.*

'Taking it for what it is, a piece of mystification, we have seldom read a better story.'—*Daily Chronicle.*

'Mr. Zangwill interests, mystifies, perplexes, and finally startles the reader in his remarkable story. . . . The story is one of imagination on the loose, but it is excellently told, and abounds in entertainment.'—*Scotsman.*

'He would be a dull novelist who couldn't, out of so surprising a phenomenon, evolve many pages of mystification and counter-mystification; and as, needless to say, Mr. Louis Zangwill is not a dull dog, he gives us our full worth.'—*Morning Leader.*

'As tangled a skein as ever the brain of Gaboriau evolved is unravelled in "A Nineteenth-Century Miracle." The mystery certainly keeps the reader on the *qui vive* until he has unravelled it.'—*Pall Mall Gazette.*

'As tantalizing a problem as was ever bound in cloth.'—*Academy.*

'Those who are interested in detective stories will find in Mr. Zangwill's story an excellent imitation, perhaps a parody, of the style of a most successful writer of such stories. . . . The interest of the tale is well sustained, the unravelling of the mystery becoming complicated with a love story, and the whole winding up with another and a double tragedy.'—*Tablet.*

'Mr. Zangwill tells his story with spirit.'—*Standard.*

A NINETEENTH-CENTURY MIRACLE

BY

LOUIS ZANGWILL

AUTHOR OF

'THE BEAUTIFUL MISS BROOKE,' 'THE WORLD AND A MAN' ETC.

A NEW EDITION

LONDON

CHATTO & WINDUS

1904

Copyright, 1897, by Louis Zangwill, in the United States of America.

A NINETEENTH-CENTURY MIRACLE

CHAPTER I.

It was past nine o'clock on a Wednesday evening in November when, with a great sense of relief, John Clinton stepped out of the train into the clamour and swirl of Victoria Station. He had travelled direct from the South of France, and, save for the forced break of a few hours at Paris, he had been cooped up since early morn on the previous day. Moreover, from motives of economy he had chosen the longer cross-Channel passage; and the boat, encountering heavy seas, had in addition arrived an hour and a half behind time.

Clinton, scarcely recovered from his recent illness, was far from being in robust condition, and even at the best of times made but a poor sailor. To-day he had been in a deplorable

Copyright, 1897, by Louis Zangwill,
in the United States of America.

A NINETEENTH-CENTURY MIRACLE

CHAPTER I.

It was past nine o'clock on a Wednesday evening in November when, with a great sense of relief, John Clinton stepped out of the train into the clamour and swirl of Victoria Station. He had travelled direct from the South of France, and, save for the forced break of a few hours at Paris, he had been cooped up since early morn on the previous day. Moreover, from motives of economy he had chosen the longer cross-Channel passage; and the boat, encountering heavy seas, had in addition arrived an hour and a half behind time.

Clinton, scarcely recovered from his recent illness, was far from being in robust condition, and even at the best of times made but a poor sailor. To-day he had been in a deplorable

plight, and, what made matters worse, had been drenched to the skin by unexpected spray a very few minutes after the boat had started. The train, too, timed for an earlier hour, had had to pick its way towards London as best it could, and Clinton's very impatience at the frequent stoppages in forlorn fields exhausted him the more.

Fortunately, he had not needed to bring with him more than a light hand-bag, for the business that recalled him from his convalescent holiday, barely a week after he had left London, would detain him in town but a couple of days. Which fact he dwelt on with satisfaction, for the fog—it had, indeed, been much thicker during the day—and the suspicion of rain, and the greasy slime underfoot, and the medley of carts, omnibuses, and hansoms, and the ghostly street-lamps, and the hurry, bustle, and uproar, made the Metropolis as depressing as it possibly could be.

He coughed a little as he emerged into the street, and instinctively put up his hand to arrange his wrap closer round his throat. His appearance, as he stood still a moment for the purpose, was pleasantly picturesque—that of the artist whose exterior proclaims his calling. A long cloak made him look taller than his height, and a sombrero crowned the long, ruddy-brown locks that fell over his neck almost like a girl's.

His eyes were brown, his features pleasant and regular, his complexion fair; and the Vandyke beard was well suited to the whole face.

At first he had no thought save of getting home and retiring to bed immediately, for he felt weak and feverish; but, as he walked the few yards necessary to reach the omnibus that passed within a minute of his studio, he was reminded by the front of a restaurant that it might be prudent to try and eat a little soup or beef-tea before going any further. This he did, and was so far revived that, in the omnibus, he was able to turn his thoughts for a while to the more cheerful subject of the morrow's business.

It was a question of selling three pictures, or even four. The sale of at least one—he had exhibited it at the last year's Academy—was a certainty, and he was the more pleased because the beautiful girl in it, enchanting the pretty group of big-eyed and open-mouthed children with some wondrous tale of adventure, was his own intended wife, whom he had thus painted. He saw her now, with her fair face, and blue eyes, and golden hair, tall and of splendid build—the true English type of girl in its perfection. She was just the sister one would expect Gerald to have; Gerald the handsome, athlete and scholar, philosopher and talker, as well as hard-working doctor—in which last capacity he earned the

bread which his other attributes, being purely decorative, could not bring. Ethelyn Manly had, indeed, been an inspiration to the artist, though marriage still seemed a long way off.

For John Clinton was far from a rich man, and would have to depend almost entirely on his profession. His small, inalienable income did but little more than pay the rent and taxes of the vast, barn-like studio, of which the attached bedroom enabled him to make a comfortable bachelor's home. But though he had earned a certain meed of fame before he had ventured to speak to Ethelyn of his love, little money had as yet accompanied it.

He had done badly this last twelvemonth—much worse than he had been induced to hope by the sale of the couple of odd landscapes and the two or three portraits of the previous year at moderate prices, the orders for which, moreover, had come so consecutively as to constitute a little spurt. Of commissions he had been favoured with but a single one during the whole of the present year—and that for a portrait, in the price of which he had been mercilessly beaten down after hard haggling, to the sordidness and injustice of which he had submitted for Ethelyn's sake; though his spirit, wounded by this undisguised chaffering about the art he loved, would have liked to assert itself hotly, and indulge in

the luxury of declining such close-fisted patronage. Otherwise, beyond a small landscape which had brought him fifty pounds, he had sold nothing else, and, though this last transaction had been with a dealer, he strongly suspected the picture had been bought by somebody through the instrumentality of dear Gerald.

For, despite that he had worked on sturdily, his anxiety about the future so preyed on his mind that he broke down at last, and Gerald—who naturally attended on him, gratis, of course—advised him to pass the worst part of the winter on the shores of the Mediterranean. John Clinton had hesitated on account of the cost, but, soon after, this same little picture, which Gerald had been particularly admiring, was applied for, the proceeds materially helping towards the expenses of the trip. And Gerald and Ethelyn saw him off as soon as he was strong enough to go.

The few days of sea-air and the hot sea-water baths Gerald had so strongly recommended had benefited him distinctly, and he was already beginning to exhibit symptoms of returning optimism, when these symptoms were greatly reinforced by the arrival of a letter from one of the largest dealers, which had been re-directed, with his other correspondence, by the post-office.

The fact that it was necessary for him to make

an immediate journey to town did not disconcert him. What better tonic than the joy of selling and of castle-building again? In the rush of enthusiasm and the momentary consciousness of vitality, the fatigue of the journey became an insignificant consideration. And even now that the terrible day was over and the rumbling, lumbering omnibus had ended by making his headache worse, he told himself that a rub down with a wet sponge and a vigorous use of his big, rough bath-towel, followed by a long night's sound sleep, would put him right again.

His studio was approached through a long gravelled alley that lay between two houses in Acacia Road, St. John's Wood. One wall of it was in line with the alley, and here was a small back entrance for models, etc., but to get to the main door one had to turn to the right through a gate into an oblong space with a long neglected garden-bed on either hand, and walk the entire length of the building. It was half-past ten when Clinton unlocked the door and stepped into the vestibule, glad enough to escape from the unpleasantness of the night ; for, though the fog seemed to be melting away, a little rain had begun to drizzle, and the air was getting colder.

It was a curious sensation, however, to have reached home again, when only a week ago he had gone off with the idea that he should not

be seeing London again till perhaps the end of February. He had got so depressed by his bad fortune that the possibility of selling anything in the meanwhile had not occurred to him. If it had, he would have dismissed it as a mad dream. But, since the opportunity had come, he dared not risk losing it, and so had set out for London immediately on receipt of the letter. He had not wired to inform Gerald and Ethelyn of his coming, having decided to wait and see the result, when he would break in upon them with the—as he hoped—pleasant tidings.

Now, as he stood still for an instant within his own door and realized that, after all, this chillness he was breathing in was not so very much of an improvement on the rawness outside, he felt sorry he had not sent them a word of message. Shattered and fatigued as he was, the warm greeting of loving lips and the cosy comfort prepared by eager hands appealed somewhat tantalizingly to his imagination, and he became more acutely aware of the damp, clinging garments in which he had now been for eight hours, and of the feverish heat of his body. A wistful longing, as a vision of blazing fires and familiar faces and sympathetic voices rose before him, made him play with the thought of even yet going on to the Manlys—the house was in Hampstead, a couple of miles up the Finchley Road, and a

hansom would take him there in a quarter of an hour. A warm bath, too, would be delicious. But somehow he felt he had not the physical force to set foot outside again, and the sound of the patter of the increasing rain, accompanied by a gust of sudden wind, decided him.

There was gas in the vestibule, but he did not trouble to light it, taking instead the candle that always stood ready in a broad-bottomed stick on the little oak table, and that he used ordinarily for looking into odd corners where the light of his lamp did not reach. For he generally read whenever he stayed at home in the evenings, and for this purpose he used a large bronze table-lamp. As he could only work by daylight, he had had no other artificial light fitted in the studio itself, though there was gas in the bedroom and in the bathroom adjoining.

He threw open the door and stepped into the darkness of the vast workshop, holding aloft his candle, so as to get to his bedroom without colliding with anything. But the cold desolation gave him pause, and he stopped almost involuntarily on the threshold.

At that moment a second gust came tearing along, roaring and whistling. A current of air, entering by he knew not what chinks, caught his puny flame, which flowed backwards before it, the melted wax running down in fantastic lines.

The feeble rays lighted up but a small space, and the great bulk of the studio was full of gray shadow. Mist, too, that had crept in during the past days of fog, and that had not yet found its way out, hovered in the air, nebulous and shapeless, like some spirit of chaos, slowly moving its half-luminous masses in and out where the darkness lay thickest.

At the extreme end, facing him, John rather divined than saw the heavy hanging that divided a narrower space from the great body of the studio, forming a model's retiring-room, from which the back-door opened out on to the gravelled alley. He had only a formless impression of the whole scene: of easels and chairs and shabby couches, and half-finished sketches, and piles of canvases, and lumber, and plaster statuettes, and picturesque properties, and odd bric-à-brac—all the stock equipment and disorderly encumberment of an artist's workshop; all gray, dim, hidden, confused.

For a moment the beat of the rain alone disturbed the silence. Then, shivering from the cold, he was seized with a fit of coughing that filled the building with echoes and warned him he must bestir himself.

A few steps to his right brought him to his bedroom, which lay just behind the vestibule. He lighted the gas here and in the bathroom, threw

off his sodden clothes, heated a little water in the geyser, with which he rapidly sponged himself, put a dry suit ready for the morning, and, extinguishing the lights again, tumbled heavily into bed. He was restless at first, and the massive dizziness of sea-sickness was still on him ; but a more or less troubled slumber came to him at last.

Meanwhile the wind grew higher and higher, and in its intervals the rain could be heard falling in floods. Even as he slept, Clinton was conscious of the storm that raged in accompaniment to unpleasantly weird dreams.

He knew not how long he had lain thus, when the whole building rattled in the storm that shrieked round it. There was a long wrenching tear, a tremendous crash, a shattering and ring of falling and breaking glass.

With beating heart and temples, Clinton leapt from his bed, and, opening the door of the room, was met by an icy draught, whilst the sound of rain pouring into the studio could not be mistaken. Whipped up by the necessity of the moment, he quickly slipped on some clothes, thrust his feet into slippers, lighted his candle, and attempted to advance with it. But it was immediately extinguished.

Never in the whole of the three years that John Clinton had lived in this studio had he had

such a strange sense of oppression from it. He was by no means afraid of the dark, but all the same he felt utterly unnerved. He had a misgiving that it was no mere natural cause that had shattered his roof. The very silence and solitude that followed the appalling crash seemed to hang over him like a pall. The whole place seemed to be pervaded with an eerie quality ; he seemed to feel the presence of an icy, mysterious something —he knew not what.

Bestirring himself again, he managed to light the lamp, in which, happily, the oil was not exhausted. With this he advanced towards the model's room, where, apparently, the mischief had been done, and, drawing aside the curtain, let his light shine full within. But he stepped back with an exclamation that was almost a cry.

For there on the ground, amid a frightful mass of débris, he saw a man lying on his back with his knees slightly raised, whilst his head, turned sideways towards the door, and away from the studio, lay motionless on his left upper arm ; and his right arm was extended, the hand pressing the ground, palm downwards and fingers spread out, as though he had tried to break the fall. The whole top-light had come down, and the remains of the supporting framework hung splintered and broken. The rain had already flooded the room, and the wind, entering through the gap, stirred

and scattered wider the loose fragments of glass.

With a great effort Clinton kept his presence of mind. That the intruder was some unfortunate housebreaker he had no doubt, for in a flash he connected the incident with the fact that the studio was supposed to be shut up and its owner away. Nevertheless, his first impulse was to do what he could for the man, who he conceived must be grievously hurt by such a fall, which would have been severe enough even without the glass.

Placing the lamp on the nearest chair, he entered the room, caught hold of the unlucky fellow's arm, and pulled him into the studio, almost stumbling himself as he trampled on crackling glass and kicked away the débris. In the light he could see the man's face was cut and bleeding, and a stream of water dripped from him. In terror he placed his hand over the heart, though the horrible face and eyes had already told their tale.

Then John Clinton swooned away.

CHAPTER II.

THE next morning's papers had but the following paragraph, sent them at the last moment by a news agency. It was headed, 'Fatal Accident to a Burglar,' and ran thus:

'Shortly after two o'clock this morning, as Police-constable Williamson was on his beat in the Wellington Road, he was accosted by a gentleman in a condition of great excitement, who proved to be Mr. John Clinton, a well-known artist residing at The Studio, Acacia Road, St. John's Wood. It appears Mr. Clinton was awakened from his slumbers by a great crash, and, on investigation, found that a burglar, in seeking entry from above, had fallen through the top-light, which, being an old and flimsy structure, had got completely wrecked and wrenched from its framework. Mr. Clinton extricated the intruder from the débris, severely cutting himself in the process; but, on attempting to revive the un-

fortunate man, he discovered life was extinct. The shock was so great that Mr. Clinton fainted. On recovering consciousness, he hastened to inform the police. Mr. Clinton, who has only recently recovered from an illness, was in a state of extreme exhaustion, and had to be treated by the divisional surgeon, Dr. Mackay, who was called in to examine the body before its removal to the mortuary. The heavy rainfall has flooded the studio, and caused considerable damage. It appears that Mr. Clinton, who had left a week ago for a three months' holiday in the South of France, was unexpectedly recalled to town, and only arrived home late last evening. The fact of his absence must have got known, and to this may doubtless be attributed the unfortunate attempt, which has ended so disastrously for the would-be housebreaker.'

This, however, was sufficient to attract a larger crowd, and, there being a temporary lull in the weather, long before noon Acacia Road and its approaches were thronged with people eager to inspect the scene of the fatal mishap. But, though the body had already been removed, policemen were on guard at the opening of the gravelled alley, for it was feared that the entry of the crowd into so narrow a passage might be attended with serious consequences.

Despite the efforts of the police to disperse them, the throngs increased each moment, and both Avenue and Wellington roads were seriously obstructed. The officers might shout 'Pass along, please! Pass along, please!' till their voices had grown hollow and raucous; the constituents of the crowd craftily contrived to outwit them by continually circulating among themselves.

About mid-day a curious expectant wave swept through the massed and moving groups. The shouts of newsboys were suddenly heard crying the first issue of the evening papers:

'The St. John's Wood burglar! Latest particulars!' and 'Death of a burglar in St. John's Wood! Full details!' were shouted in all directions.

THROUGH THE TOP-LIGHT BUNGLING BURGLAR BASHES

read the bill of a notoriously alliterative newssheet that plastered the roadway; but

A STRANGE NOCTURNAL VISITANT: WAS HE A BURGLAR?

was the poster that drew the most business. There was a clinking of coins in the air, a fluttering of papers that caught the eye like so many hundreds of flags.

But soon a new shout was heard amid the hubbub, drawing the attention by the very fact of its ignoring the sensation of the moment, which for a time it was successful in ousting :

'Great storm in the Channel! Well-known City merchant washed off the Ostend boat!'

But even this was not fated to be long exempt from competition. A special edition of a local print came along with the rival announcement :

GREAT STORM. WELL-KNOWN RESIDENT OF FINCHLEY ROAD LOST IN THE CHANNEL.

Dr. Gerald Manly, driving with his partner, Dr. Whiting, along Wellington Road, was one of the first to patronize this latest sheet, though he bought at the same time copies of the half-dozen others that were being offered for sale. The first ones he looked at merely repeated the morning papers, with just the addition that Mr. John Clinton was being taken care of at the house of his friend, Dr. Gerald Manly, whither he had that morning been conveyed, and that, though very exhausted and feverish, he was progressing as favourably as could be expected.

The paragraph which proved most interesting, however, read thus :

'THE STRANGE NOCTURNAL VISITANT : WAS HE A BURGLAR?

'Not very many people would envy Mr. John Clinton, of The Studio, Acacia Road, St. John's Wood, his gruesome experience of last night. Not only had he the terrible shock of finding the would-be nocturnal intruder had killed himself in his fall through a top-light—a shock the effects of which may prove somewhat grave in the already weak state of Mr. Clinton's health—but, in his attempt to assist the man, whom he supposed to be merely injured, both his hands and feet, which latter were only protected by thin slippers, were badly cut.

'From the further details that have come to hand this morning, it seems that the case now presents some very unexpected and rather mysterious aspects. At first it seemed reasonable enough to assume that the man had got wind of Mr. Clinton's supposed absence from town, and had taken the opportunity of trying to break into the premises ; but when one remembers the fearful storm of wind and rain that raged at the time, and how dark the night was, one is inclined to think that only a lunatic rather than a burglar would have been found walking under such conditions on a slippery studio-roof, the greater part of which, he must have known, consisted of glass,

and on which a false step would be fatal. That he was so walking is beyond question, and the mishap that befell him was therefore almost inevitable.

'Which brings us to our own belief that the man *was* a lunatic and not a burglar. The further details that have since been ascertained strengthen our position. For the storm was so great that in every part of London roofing and chimney-pots were destroyed and blown about, many windows were wrecked, and several hoardings and walls were thrown down. In the immediate neighbourhood of the studio, as everywhere else, considerable havoc was wrought, and amid the mess and wreckage in the studio were found the broken pieces of tiles and of a chimney-pot that had been blown down from the adjoining house. These might, of course, have fallen into the big gap left by the top-light; or, as we prefer to believe, the same gust of wind that swept them down must have caused the unfortunate victim to slip and miss his footing, and, the framework of the top-light being old and rotten, the whole crashed down in one mass. The tiling of the studio itself has suffered severely, and we cannot imagine any sane man, unless compelled, would have exposed himself to the danger of such a wild night.

'But what really confirms us in our view is the fact that the clothes in which the body was

dressed, though soaked through and through, seem to be those of a gentleman. The shirt-studs and links are of gold, and a valuable gold watch and a gold pencil-case were discovered in the pockets. A hard felt hat has been found lying about the floor, but trampled on and sodden out of shape. There were no papers in the pockets, nor has anything been found likely to give any clue to the identity of the deceased, unless the monogram "A," on linen and handkerchiefs, which were of fine quality, can be considered such. But we make no doubt that the deceased will eventually be proved to be the victim of mental aberration, in all probability some harmless lunatic who had eluded the vigilance of his friends.

'The description of the deceased issued by the police is as follows:

'Height, five feet five inches; short black hair, very thin on top; short pointed beard and bushy black moustache; complexion dark; eyes deep set and hazel-coloured; high forehead and square chin; wearing long black vicuna overcoat, plain black frock-suit, and tanned gloves; apparent age, 49. The publicity given to the whole matter is likely to make his family and friends come forward very soon now—nay, the identity of the deceased may even by now have been established beyond the shadow of a doubt.'

'Poor old Clinton!' murmured Gerald to Dr. Whiting, 'what a bad time he must have had! I'm glad I've forbidden him to be seen by any interviewers.'

Meanwhile, Dr. Whiting had taken up the local paper and had been reading the following account of the Channel mishap :

'A cablegram from Ostend was received at Dover early this morning, announcing that, on the arrival of the mail-boat, after a tempestuous passage, one of the passengers was found to be missing, his effects being discovered on board, to wit, a handbag, dressing-case, rug, umbrella, and walking cane ; and a small trunk labelled " Robert Ashfield " among the passengers' luggage. It appears that one of the men found the smaller articles pitching about on deck, and removed them to a place of safety. There can be little doubt that their unfortunate owner was carried overboard by a great sea that struck the vessel about one o'clock—barely an hour after it had been able to make a fair start. It has now been ascertained beyond question that the missing gentleman is Mr. Robert Ashfield, of Leadenhall Street and Colombo Hall, Finchley Road, N.W., the owner of considerable tea-plantations in Ceylon, a man of great wealth, and widely known in the City, where the news of his terrible fate has caused considerable consternation.

'It appears that Mr. Ashfield had to cross on business, the clerk whom he usually entrusted with the commission being seriously ill at home. Mr. Ashfield had made the journey himself occasionally, and decided to do so again. It was expected at the office he would not be back for three days. He left business at half-past eight, after a long and busy day, and went on to Cannon Street Station, where his wife was to meet him with the luggage, for he had decided to take her with him, thinking she would like the trip. At the station she was alarmed by the increasing denseness of the fog, and begged him not to go. He suggested they should proceed as far as Dover, where, if they found it inadvisable to make the crossing, they might stay for the night, hoping for fairer weather next day.

'At Dover there was no fog, nor did the weather at first seem extraordinarily rough, and after a short discussion it was agreed that Mr. Ashfield—who was a good sailor, having made the voyage several times to and from Ceylon—should go on alone. Mrs. Ashfield went on board with her husband just for a moment, but came off feeling rather uneasy and apprehensive about the weather, as the wind began to blow more strongly. At the Lord Warden Hotel she was so upset and hysterical that a maid had to sit up with her. The news of the calamity arrived about half-past

six this morning. Everybody in the hotel was talking of it by breakfast-time, and, of course, it could not be concealed from Mrs. Ashfield. The poor lady is completely prostrated, and is the object of much sympathy.'

'It's a very sad thing, isn't it?' commented Dr. Whiting, after he had made Gerald read the report. 'Poor Mrs. Ashfield must be terribly cut up. She has only been married to him four years, and such a bright little woman, too!'

'She is indeed!' exclaimed Gerald, 'much more brains than he!'

They made pleasing pendants to each other, these two doctors: Gerald, thirty-three and in the full pride of manhood; his partner, seventy, stately and white-haired. The old man, of whom Gerald was a connection, had given him a partnership in the practice, not only because of its growth, but because his advancing years made him feel the need of a sturdy co-worker. Gerald had done brilliantly as a student—had carried off all the medals and scholarships. He was still unmarried, and Ethelyn so far kept house for him in Hampstead. It was at Dr. Whiting's house that the practice was mainly carried on, though Gerald did not omit to have the usual red lamp and brass plate outside his own.

'I was in practice here long before poor Ashfield bought Colombo Hall, and that was ten years ago,' exclaimed the old man. 'I attended his first wife on her death-bed. And then there are the two lads, George and Percival, whom he sent out to Ceylon before he married again. They little thought then they were saying "Good-bye" to him for the last time. Very sad, very sad! Dear, dear me, how the time flies!' he sighed, as the carriage pulled up. 'Let me see: how long is it since you took over that part of the practice? Two years already; and it seems only the other day! Well, I must get down here. Drive right back to your house and see how poor Jack Clinton's getting along.'

'Poor Jack!' repeated Gerald. 'I dare say he feels now how rash it was of him to come back from the South. It isn't everybody,' he added, as the smiling shadow of a grimly-humorous thought flitted across his fine features, 'who gets such a sharp lesson of the danger of disobeying doctors' orders.' Then, as his eye fell again over the paper in his hand, 'Strange,' he added, musingly; 'it never rains but it pours. Here are two out-of-the-way tragedies in to-day's paper, and here am I, in a way, personally interested in both.'

'Poor Ashfield!' murmured Dr. Whiting, musing in his turn. '*He* never disobeyed doctors' orders. A most exemplary man! Well, well, such is life: send the carriage for me in an hour.'

Gerald glanced at his watch.

'I wonder if I ought to send Mrs. Ashfield a wire of condolence,' he said, as Dr. Whiting was about to step down. 'Or perhaps you'd better do it in the name of both of us, as you are the senior, and you've known the family so long.'

'But suppose Ashfield turns up safe and sound?' said Dr. Whiting. 'After all, there's no certainty that he was washed overboard, and that the news won't be contradicted in the next edition of the papers. Why, look at this burglar business, which is now turning into a lunacy case.'

'And *I* don't even believe in the lunacy version,' said Gerald. 'There's more in the business than meets the eye. But as for Ashfield—I rather fear there won't be any contradiction there.'

He shook his head dubiously as the horse started off at a trot.

CHAPTER III.

GERALD gave strict orders that John Clinton was not to rise even the next day, Friday, despite that the young artist fretted at the risk of losing the business chance that had offered itself. However, the matter was easily arranged, the dealer consenting to run up to the house to see him and discuss prices, and undertaking to remove from the studio those of the pictures he wanted to show his clients. In the afternoon Ethelyn came in to talk to him a little. She mentioned that among those who had yesterday inquired at the door was Elias, the odd man, who in ordinary times was engaged to come into the studio every morning to clear up, and who sometimes posed a little. He was a poor half-witted fellow, who wore the Salvation Army uniform. Still strong and active, in spite of his hoary age, he had heard what had happened, and had wanted to know if his services would not now be required again earlier than he had last been given to understand.

'You mustn't think that's all he came about,' continued Ethelyn smilingly. 'Of course, he asked how you were progressing—there were really tears in his eyes.'

'Oh, if his work *had* been all he came about, that would simply have proved his honesty,' said Clinton; 'for I paid him for six weeks in advance, and he must have felt quite rich, though it was only a trifle. What is that shouting in the street?' he asked somewhat excitedly. 'Something new about the—ugh! I see the ghastly thing now.'

'Please keep calm, Jack dear,' pleaded Ethelyn tenderly, brushing back the disordered locks from his forehead, but leaving just one in front. 'There, that makes such a pretty kiss-curl!'

But the coarse, bawling voices seemed to be approaching nearer the house, one taking up another without intermission, and occasionally two falling together right lustily, filling the whole universe, as it seemed, with their voluminous noise. That the men were selling the evening papers was evident; yet the nearer they came, the more hopeless seemed the effort to catch their words.

'"Body"—I'm sure I made out "body,"' insisted John, half raising himself.

'Lie down at once and keep still, you bad boy!' said Ethelyn, with sweet severity.

But, in truth, Ethelyn was quite as eager as her patient to learn what more had come to light, and she only hesitated lest, as she judged possible from the vehemence with which it was being announced, it might prove to be too sensational. However, as he kept urging her to get a paper, she sent out a servant for one.

'Now be still and good, and promise not to get excited,' she admonished him as she unfolded the paper, intending to look through it first, and either to read to him or tell him briefly its contents according as she should deem best. But as the big headlines and sub-headlines caught her eye her face paled perceptibly.

'Well, Ethelyn, what is it?' he inquired anxiously.

She recovered herself rapidly as her eyes ran down the column, and finished by laughing.

'For the moment it took me quite aback. I ought to have remembered the sensation-mongers would have set to work by now. The thing will really amuse you. They make fun of it themselves at the end. As you didn't read yesterday's papers, I must explain to you that the Robert Ashfield mentioned was washed overboard in the Channel the night before last from the Ostend boat. This is what the paper says:

'"ST. JOHN'S WOOD CASE BECOMES A MYSTERY.

'"REPORTED IDENTIFICATION OF THE BODY.

'"ASTOUNDING SUGGESTION.

'"The by now notorious St. John's Wood case, in which a supposed housebreaker met with his death by falling through the top-light of the studio of Mr. John Clinton, the well-known painter, in the early hours of yesterday morning, has, according to the latest information, suddenly assumed a most unexpected and sensational aspect.

'"The report which comes to hand almost at the moment of our going to press states that the body was this morning identified through the ingenious and successful action of Inspector Murray, who had taken careful note of the name and address of a fashionable West-End tailor on the inside of the collar of the frock-coat of the deceased, though the overcoat did not bear any maker's name. Inspector Murray immediately interviewed the manager at the establishment indicated, and got him to come and see the body, which, after considerable hesitation, he appeared to recognise. However, he still hesitated, saying that, though the clothes worn by the deceased, with the exception of the overcoat, were undoubtedly made by his firm, and though the deceased reminded him strongly

of one of their clients, he could make no statement as to his identity. Under further pressure, the manager admitted he had been about to let fall from his lips the words 'Robert Ashfield,' when he realized he was about to mention the name of the very customer whose lamentable fate had formed the staple subject of conversation in their establishment the whole of the previous day. As, of course, this could not be his body, though, as he had said, there was no little resemblance between the two men, he was afraid he had been called upon to no purpose.

'"However, Inspector Murray, who has the reputation of being a very smart officer, apparently thinks there is more in this resemblance than one would naturally be inclined to believe. We learn that he has journeyed to Dover by this morning's boat-train, to interview Mrs. Ashfield, who has so far been unable to leave the Lord Warden Hotel. Other steps, too, have been taken, but the police have exhibited a sudden reticence in the matter. Our own reporter could get no direct information. A cable message from Ostend states that it has been ascertained beyond all doubt that Mr. Robert Ashfield did not land there, which disposes of the last forlorn hope of his friends.

'"If, as the above report seems to indicate, Inspector Murray has got the startling idea into

his head that the body now lying in the mortuary is the body of Mr. Ashfield, who was drowned at least a hundred miles from St. John's Wood—and a rumour to that effect has already spread—no doubt he has his reasons. As we have already remarked, he has the reputation of being one of the smartest officers in the force, and we suppose he feels himself called upon to live up to his reputation. We need hardly say that, personally, we feel very sceptical indeed on the subject of this extraordinary identification; and we have scarcely a doubt but that the tailor's manager will be found on investigation to have been grossly mistaken, or, any way, that the supposed resemblance between the two men was of the slightest. On the other hand, there can be no question that, should this purely imaginary identity prove after all to be a real identity—and we suggest the hypothesis purely by way of giving a little rein to our fancy —then indeed would the St. John's Wood tragedy have become a mystery as gruesome as astounding."'

Despite that both John and Ethelyn agreed with the personal point of view expressed in the above, the rumour caused no little excitement in the City. Invariably received with an incredulous smile, it yet impressed deeply, and the afterthoughts it set going were not without a tinge of

admission of the possibility of its truth. Some people frankly declared they believed it, stoutly persisting in face of the roars of laughter with which they were greeted; but even the sincerest sceptics paled when it began to be bruited about that the extraordinary report of the identity was true, after all.

In Leadenhall Street it was known that the police had called at Mr. Ashfield's offices, and that the two chief clerks had gone back with them. And this piece of intelligence spread rapidly through the City, its significance being eagerly and endlessly discussed. That a man swept overboard in mid-Channel should immediately crash through the roof of a studio in St. John's Wood—for the quick, sensation-loving eye of the public had at once perceived the two happenings to synchronize—was a strange, astounding thing! At every café and restaurant the conversation ran so exclusively on this topic, and was carried on with such raised, excited voices, that all reserve was broken down, and anyone could suddenly intrude on any group with a remark or suggestion without being stared at resentfully or considered rude.

Residents of Hampstead and Finchley became centres of special interest. Passengers who had crossed in the same boat with John Clinton, or had come from the Continent on the memorable

Wednesday night, and could give realistic descriptions of the weather, were lionized. Discipline was relaxed in the most strictly-ruled establishments, tyrant taskmasters eagerly debating the mystery with their subordinates. From the evening papers no real verification could as yet be obtained, for, though one asserted boldly it had positive information of the reality of this strange identification, the others timidly took refuge in skilfully-worded indefiniteness.

But towards five o'clock London was seized with a mad spasm of fever. There was a great rush for the papers, which at last were all emphatically unanimous, all containing the unqualified announcement that the man who had killed himself in falling through the top-light of Mr. John Clinton's studio in the early hours of Thursday morning, and the wealthy Robert Ashfield, who had about the same time been washed from the Ostend boat in the tempestuous weather that prevailed in the Channel, were one and the same person. Both the servants at Colombo Hall and Mr. Ashfield's own clerks had recognised the body now lying at the mortuary, and its identity could no longer be questioned. The police were absolutely reticent. It was known that Mrs. Ashfield had arrived in town that afternoon with Inspector Murray, and that the bereaved lady was now at Columbo Hall.

The press were unable to obtain admission to her, being informed she was in a state of utter collapse.

In Fleet Street and the Strand the boys and newsvendors fought like wild beasts outside the newspaper offices to be beforehand with one another in obtaining their supplies of the printed sheets. The streets were filled with resonant shouts and cries, whilst the great steam-presses ran on beyond their speed in their effort to cope with the demand. As the *Moon*, which now shamelessly and without reserve pandered to the public mood, sententiously observed, and as the public had already felt—it gave it a thrill to read its own obvious thought in print—the latest development of the case presented a mystery which, unless it were cleared up, most people would admit to be without precedent in the whole course of the century.

Though the interest in Acacia Road and its neighbourhood manifested by the public the day before had this morning considerably abated, the afternoon found St. John's Wood invaded by a vast, thick concourse, with which the police, despite a large reinforcement, were quite unable to deal.

Colombo Hall had the appearance of sustaining a siege. Dr. Gerald Manly's carriage was waiting outside the house, and, as he at length

emerged, a thousand inquisitive eyes sought a glimpse of the interior. The raw misty atmosphere was forgotten in the heat of the universal excited chatter, and plausible, eloquent talkers rapidly became the centre of ever-increasing groups.

'I almost feel excited, Gerald dear,' said Ethelyn, when her brother arrived home at his usual late hour. 'The newsvendors have been so noisy all the afternoon that they've almost succeeded in making me believe something really astonishing has come to light. I'm afraid they've been seriously disturbing poor Jack.'

'But something really astonishing *has* come to light; at least, the world finds it astonishing. Why didn't you get a paper and see?'

'Jack did worry me into buying one. It only said that a curious rumour had got about, and it rather made fun of it. You don't mean, Gerald, that—that——'

'That the curious rumour has been confirmed. The extra specials say so, any way. Ashfield's clerks are responsible for the furore. Jack will have to be present at the inquest—more's the pity; and he's not so ill as to have any excuse for not appearing. For my part, the sooner this affair is over, the better. As soon as Jack can leave, we must get him back to Nice, and then this confounded mystery will appeal to us merely as outsiders.'

Gerald went on eating his soup, while Ethelyn gave him a favourable account of the patient, who was now in a sound sleep.

'But tell me,' she asked, after a pause, 'what do you think about the—mystery, as they call it?'

'You seem to have as much appetite for the marvellous as I for my supper, little girl,' said Gerald, laughing. 'You don't suppose that I have wasted any thought on so idle and ridiculous a subject?—though I've had to listen to the views of a good many of my patients, and some of them were garrulous enough, in all conscience. No doubt those police fellows think themselves enormously clever. If I had an opinion at all, I should be inclined to think that possibly the two men were about the same size, and the tailor, who admits he was excited by the Ashfield mishap, probably got Ashfield on his brain. And, when a sensational rumour of this kind has once got started, even a man's best friends are prepared to swear on the least possible ground that they recognise him in any dead body that may be brought under their eyes.'

'Oh, but the maker's name was on the clothes.'

'Which doesn't prove he got them from the maker; but, even so, there's nothing to prevent him having been some other customer—which, of course, is rather hard on the tailor: two customers lost at one blow.'

'Gerald! I really ought to be shocked—which, I suppose, is just what you want. But I am too used to your little ways for that. I do wish you'd fall in love; it would make you ever so much nicer. And then it would be such fun to hear you sentimentalize.'

'Love——' began Gerald.

'Yes, yes,' interrupted Ethelyn. 'It's a disease of the stomach. I've heard you say all that before. But never mind; it's a disease from which not even you are safe, and when you do catch it——'

'That the woful spectacle of a man in love should give women such exquisite pleasure is but another proof of the innate brutality of their nature,' retorted the doctor.

CHAPTER IV.

After the breathless hubbub of the first sensation, there set in an expectant calm, a waiting as in confident anticipation of shuddersome revelation to follow. A thrill of superstitious feeling had passed over all England. But while the sceptical and the bolder spirits had recovered from the first shock given them by the flat absoluteness of the newspaper statement, with its air of unchallengeableness, declaring they had been taken aback by its very audacity, and that quite another story would come out at the inquest; the minds of the majority of folk were in malleable condition, waiting submissively to be shaped according to any pattern that might be imposed on them.

John Clinton, after his long rest and the careful attention Gerald and Ethelyn had bestowed on him, had recovered his usual composure. Nevertheless, Gerald impressed upon him the necessity of giving his evidence at the inquest in a calm, almost impersonal manner.

As he could not yet walk, his feet being still bandaged and encased in huge, soft slippers, he had to be assisted into the court, where he resignedly submitted to be stared at by the crowd assembled, instinctively divining, too, that one or two representatives of the press were sketching him.

Mrs. Ashfield entered a moment later, accompanied by an elderly lady. She struck him as being below the medium height, and unexpectedly young, though he did not get any impression of beauty. Her face was thickly veiled, but there were moments when her figure, in the slightness of its build, might be taken for that of a girl of fifteen.

The coroner, in the course of a few preliminary remarks to the jury, mentioned that the present case had been the subject of a good deal of public speculation and newspaper comment. He would impress upon them the necessity of putting all that they had heard or read out of their minds, and of being guided entirely by the investigation that was to follow.

'It is true,' he continued, 'that, according to my information, the case presents some very remarkable features, and that the complete determination of the actual causes which have resulted in the death of the unfortunate person whose body we shall presently have an opportunity of viewing,

will necessitate the examination of a large number of witnesses. This is due to the fact that we shall be forced to take a good deal of apparently indirect evidence, which, at first sight, will appear to have reference to a totally distinct matter. Owing, moreover, to the remarkable circumstances to which I have just alluded, I am of opinion that any attempt at such preliminary and formal identification of the body of the deceased as is customary would be quite futile. I may say the whole question of the identification of the deceased presents peculiar difficulties, and it is so bound up with the whole investigation as to be quite inseparable therefrom.

'You will have gathered, from my present remarks, that the true determination of the cause of the death of the deceased may be found to be dependent upon the true identification of the body; but it will be sufficient discharge of your duties for you to state the former, according to the best of your judgment. We will now proceed, gentlemen, to view the body.'

This last-mentioned formality having been carried through, the coroner and jury returned to the court, and the investigation was proceeded with.

Clinton, who could not stand, and had to be accommodated with a chair, was the first called upon to give his evidence, and narrated how, on arriving

home after his long journey, he had gone straight to bed, and how he had been roused about one o'clock in the morning by the violent fall of the deceased through the top-light. He had lifted the body from amid the wreckage, when he perceived life was extinct. He had fainted, but, on recovering himself, he must have gone to call in the police.

The Coroner: 'You say you "must have gone." Do you mean to suggest that somebody else may have gone to inform them ?'

Clinton : 'I do not mean to suggest that.' (After thinking a moment) 'It comes back to me now that I did accost a policeman—no doubt the first one I met.'

The Coroner (kindly) : 'It would help us if you were a little more definite. Cannot you try and recall the exact course of events ?'

Clinton : 'I fear I have no clear remembrance of what exactly happened after I swooned. I was very exhausted from travelling, and it was only probably by a great effort that I dragged myself out at all. I did not even know at the time that I had hurt myself, and I was quite surprised the next morning to find my hands and feet so severely cut.'

The Coroner : 'Were your feet not protected ?'

Clinton : 'I believe I had slippers on.'

The Coroner : 'Are they the ones now produced ?'

Clinton (inspecting the slippers handed him, in amused surprise) : 'Yes ; these are certainly my property.'

The Coroner : 'I do not question that. Be good enough to say if the slippers produced were those worn by you at the time.'

Clinton : 'I think I may say they were. The soles are cut through.'

The slippers were handed round for the jury's inspection.

A Juryman (suspiciously) : 'Does the witness assert he went out with these into the mud and rain ?'

Clinton : 'Though I have scarcely any recollection of doing so, I must have put on boots and thrown my cloak round me.'

The Juryman : 'Where were these found ?'

Clinton : 'I don't know.'

The Coroner (reading a slip passed to him) : 'I am informed they were found in witness's bathroom. But this point will be raised later on. You have stated you were roused about one o'clock in the morning. How is it you are able to mention that time so definitely, when you are so nebulous about everything else ?'

Clinton : 'I fear I have been led into mentioning the result of a mere calculation based on what

I have since heard. I had really no idea at the time.'

The Coroner: 'Please try and be more careful, Mr. Clinton, as the point is one of importance. You may have remained unconscious for quite a considerable time before you were able to inform the police.'

Clinton: 'Yes.'

Clinton, further examined, said the studio was an old building—he could not say how old. The model's retiring-room was curtained off by a dark plush hanging. The top-light over it was in the centre of the roof, and was about six feet by four. It was divided into several panes. It could be opened, though he had never done so. There had once been a cord attached to it for the purpose, but it had long since disappeared. He could not say what had become of it; probably it had got rotten and broken off. The distance from the top-light to the floor was about twenty-two feet. There were no other windows in this detached part of the studio. The upper part of the walls sloped for about six feet to join the ceiling.

A Juryman: 'Can we not inspect the studio?'

The Coroner: 'We shall do so on rising to-day. As I have already told you, there are a great number of witnesses to be examined, and it will be quite impossible to complete the investigation

this afternoon. I hold it of the greatest importance that every witness should be examined with great minuteness, and there are many points of apparent insignificance upon which I shall lay stress, the reason for which will become clear to you as we proceed. I beg of you to give the closest attention to the evidence, even should it appear to diverge from the main lines.'

Clinton then continued his evidence. There were two doors to the studio: the main entry, which opened into a vestibule, which in its turn opened into the body of the studio; and an entry at the back, opening direct into the model's room. Yes, by the model's room he did mean the room which had been the scene of the mishap. Both doors were locked during his absence, and he had come in through the front-door, having to use both the ordinary key and the latch-key, which he had taken with him on his bunch. He had only one of each. He had never known duplicates of these keys to exist.

A Juryman: 'Can you say positively that duplicates of these keys have never existed?'

Clinton: 'I fear I cannot make so positive a statement as that.'

The witness went on to state that the back-door had not been used for some time, as he had been ill all the previous month, and unable to work.

The Coroner: 'The key of that is, I suppose, on your bunch?'

Clinton: 'No; I did not keep that on my bunch, as the door was always locked from the inside, and I never used it myself.'

The Coroner: 'Where is the key at the present moment?'

Clinton: 'In the lock, I suppose. I do not think it has ever been removed.'

The Coroner: 'Are you sure you did not take it away with you?'

Clinton: 'It's possible I did, though it's not very likely.'

The Coroner: 'How long had you been absent?'

Clinton: 'I had left on the previous Tuesday morning.'

The Coroner: 'It was known to your friends that you would be absent for three months?'

Clinton: 'They knew I should be absent, certainly, for a considerable time.'

In further reply to the coroner, Clinton explained that the only servant he had was an odd man, who came in for a few hours each morning. He had promised to let the man know as soon as he should require him again. Elias, as he was known, was there last on the Tuesday he—witness—left London. He had come in extra early to clear up, and had carried out witness's luggage to the cab. He—the witness—had carefully locked up, and Elias, who was much attached to him, had wished him a good time.

The Coroner: 'Is the man here to-day?'

On being informed he was not, he sharply inquired, 'Why not?' It was explained that the police had had no knowledge of his existence.

The Coroner (severely): 'Let the man be here at our next sitting without fail. I consider his presence and examination of great importance. (To Clinton) Do you know where he resides?'

Clinton: 'I have it scribbled down somewhere. I'll look it up.'

The Coroner: 'What sort of company does the man frequent?'

Clinton: 'I know nothing about him, save that he is sober and reliable. He is a member of the Salvation Army. I believe his intelligence is somewhat limited.'

The Coroner (sharply): 'I see no necessary connection between your last two remarks.'

Clinton: 'I did not intend to suggest any. I made two distinct, disconnected, and absolutely true statements.'

Continuing, Clinton eventually admitted that, on the hypothesis that Elias had bad acquaintances, it was not impossible he had communicated to them the fact of his employer's intended absence. Witness next described the general arrangement of the studio, stating that the bed-

room and bathroom, which communicated by a door, though both had separate entrances from the studio, were on the same side of the studio as the vestibule. Thus, on entering from the vestibule, he had only to turn to his right, and the bedroom door was on the other side of the fireplace.

The Coroner: 'You say the building was an old one. Have you ever had any trouble with the roof in wet weather?'

Clinton: 'Water has occasionally soaked through in places, though it has never done any damage. The top-light in the back-room, however, never quite fitted. Sometimes a bucket had to be put under to catch the water. No doubt the woodwork was in a very rotten condition.'

The next witness was Inspector Murray, who stated that information of the accident was brought to him about a quarter past two on Thursday morning. He immediately repaired to The Studio, Acacia Road, with the divisional surgeon, Dr. Mackay. He there found the deceased lying across a chair. His head, which had evidently fallen, hung down, and rested against the floor. A large bronze lamp burned on an adjoining chair. Mr. Clinton was lying almost unconscious on a couch, having been carried in by the constable, and, by Dr. Mackay's directions, he was undressed and placed in his bed, whence he was removed in the morning to the house of Dr. Gerald Manly,

to whom he had sent a message. Mr. Clinton had a cloak over him, but no coat and vest underneath. He had no socks on, and his boots were not laced up; he had evidently pulled them on in a hurry over bare feet. When the boots were removed, his feet were found to be badly cut, as well as the hands, and Dr. Mackay washed and bandaged both. The slippers produced were found in the bathroom. There were still small fragments of glass adhering to them, though most had dropped off. When first found they were wet with blood. Mr. Clinton must have bled a great deal. There were marks of blood on the floor in the bathroom, and he had been able to trace a line of similar marks from the bathroom, right along the floor, till it was obliterated half-way by the streams of water that flowed from the back-room. The wet suit Mr. Clinton had taken off was found in the bathroom, and he had evidently gone there to put on his boots after recovering from his swoon.

The clothes of the deceased were sopping wet. His face and head were badly cut. In the pockets there were no papers, though deceased wore a gold watch and chain. There was no name engraved on the watch. He had also likewise discovered in the pockets a gold pencil-case, two silk handkerchiefs, and a purse containing £11 in gold, besides some silver. The purse was in

the right-hand trousers pocket. The linen and handkerchiefs were marked with the monogram 'A.' There were no bank-notes on the person of the deceased. His shirt-studs and links were of gold. His hat—a hard felt one—was found on the floor. It had been trampled on. The maker's name was not on the overcoat, but only on the frock-coat. The back-room was flooded, and the water was only stopped from spreading all over the studio by a certain slight inequality in the flooring, which rose just a trifle, and by being sopped up and impeded by the rugs that lay about. The broken framework, part of which still adhered to the roof, was evidently quite rotten. Among the débris were several broken tiles and the fragments of two chimney-pots, all of which, on investigation, he found to have come down from the top of the neighbouring house on the other side of the narrow alley. The alley might be eight feet wide at the outside, and the tiles and pots would quite naturally have fallen in. Beyond having a tarpaulin placed over the gap left by the top-light, nothing had been touched in the back-room.

The Coroner: 'And the key of the back-door is still in the lock?'

Inspector Murray: 'There was no key in the lock.'

The Coroner: 'Or lying on the ground?'

Inspector Murray: 'Not so far as I could see.'

The Coroner: 'Nothing has been disturbed in the studio?'

Inspector Murray: 'Three of the pictures that hung on the walls have been allowed to be taken away by a dealer at the request of Mr. Clinton.'

The Coroner: 'I am sorry that anything should have been touched.'

Inspector Murray, continuing his evidence, said the name of the maker on the frock-coat of the deceased suggested to him the idea of calling at the establishment in question. Mr. Milton, the manager, readily agreed to accompany him, and, though he would not commit himself, admitted that the deceased bore a remarkable resemblance to a customer of theirs, no other than the wealthy Robert Ashfield, and that the clothes, excepting the overcoat, were undoubtedly made by his firm. Later in the day he was able to let him know that the suit answered in every respect to the description of one made by his firm for Mr. Ashfield but a few weeks back. Mr. Ashfield, as was by now well known, had met with an untimely end in the Channel on the same Wednesday night, and it was in consequence of this fact, and of a communication made to him by Dr. Mackay, which that gentleman would place

before the court in his report very much better than the witness could, that the witness decided to go down to Dover immediately and see Mrs. Ashfield.

An Intellectual-looking Juryman: 'Is this relevant?'

The Coroner (to the Jury): 'You will observe, gentlemen, that this part of the evidence is perfectly relevant, and I hope you will here bear in mind the remarks I thought it advisable to address to you at the commencement of the present investigation. The reasons I had for doing so will soon become clear to you.'

The Intellectual-looking Juryman: 'Would it not be easier to follow the witness if we heard the medical evidence first?'

The Coroner: 'I have no objection to that course.'

Dr. Mackay, having stated how he had gone with the last witness to The Studio, Acacia Road, St. John's Wood, and there found the deceased, proceeded to describe the posture of the body, giving the same details as had already been furnished to the jury. After satisfying himself that life was absolutely extinct, he had seen to Mr. Clinton, who appeared in immediate need of attention. He then proceeded with his first examination of the body, by the appearance of which he was greatly puzzled, having regard to

the manner of death. That water ran from the deceased's garments was not astonishing, considering the heavy rainfall. They were, in fact, completely sodden. But the inexplicable part was that *the deceased presented every indication of having met his death by drowning.*

There was a solemn silence. A shudder ran through the court, the coroner alone sitting in stern impassiveness. Mrs. Ashfield exhibited signs of collapse, but, soothed by her companion, heroically bore up.

When this slight commotion had calmed down, Dr. Mackay explained that the eyelids of the deceased were half closed, and the pupils strangely dilated. The whole body was completely cold. Both lips and nostrils were covered with a thick, frothy mucus. The face was much cut by the glass, which was sticking in many of the wounds; but these did not bleed much, as the blood had quickly clotted. On the back of the head was a severe scalp wound. The scalp there was terribly swollen. He could not say within an hour or so, but death was quite recent. So impressed was he with the strangeness of the case that he called in Dr. Peters to assist him in his after-investigation; and that gentleman would tell them that, as the result of a very thorough examination, they had both been forced to the conclusion that the immediate cause of death was suffocation by

drowning. The lungs were spongy, distended, and contained much froth from convulsive attempts to breathe. What put the fact entirely beyond challenge was that they had ascertained the stomach of the deceased—which contained very little food—to be full of water, and that, on examination, *this water proved undoubtedly to be sea-water.*

The painful thrill attendant on these words was followed by a shapeless, inarticulate murmur that escaped from the throats of all. Many faces were pale.

'Not wishing to rely on our own results,' continued Dr. Mackay, 'in a case so mysterious and baffling, we called in the services of two eminent analysts, both Fellows of the Royal Society, and they will tell you that they corroborate me to the full. They have even examined the garments of the deceased, and they have come to the conclusion that they were impregnated — not with ordinary water—but with sea-water.'

The Coroner: 'Is there no other way in which that condition of the lungs which you have just described could be brought about?'

Dr. Mackay: 'That condition of the lungs is solely to be met with in cases of suffocation by drowning. It cannot be produced by any other possible cause. That and the filling of the stomach are both the results of vital action on the

part of the drowning person. The fluid in the stomach invariably corresponds to that in which death has taken place.'

The Coroner: 'The contusion on the scalp of the deceased, I take it, would be accounted for by the fall?'

Dr. Mackay: 'From its nature I should say it could hardly have resulted from the head striking the floor of the studio. It had the appearance of having been caused by some hard, blunt edge, and most probably preceded the suffocation by drowning.'

The Coroner: 'How could that last fact be ascertained?'

Dr. Mackay: 'I have already mentioned that the condition of the lungs and stomach could only have been brought about by vital acts on the part of the drowning person. Since, therefore, the contusion was not the cause of death, it must probably have preceded it.'

The Coroner: 'If a person were washed off a ship—I am putting a purely hypothetical case to you, Dr. Mackay—might not such a contusion be caused by the head coming into violent contact with the edge of the side of the ship, or striking against a stanchion?' (Sensation.)

Dr. Mackay: 'Most certainly it might.'

A Juryman: 'You say that the fluid in the stomach was sea-water. How could this be

determined positively? It would not remain unchanged.'

Dr. Mackay: 'The proportion of saline constituents in the fluid decides the fact beyond question.'

Another Juryman: 'Is it not possible that a downpour of rain might be so great as to cause drowning?'

Dr. Mackay: 'I have no knowledge of any such rainfall being on record.'

The Juryman: 'That is a pity, because all the so-called mysterious features of the present case would at once disappear.'

For a moment there was a distinct sense of relief, which was, however, immediately nullified by Dr. Mackay retorting dryly that he was not aware that the clouds were in the habit of raining down salt sea-water.

The Juryman (triumphantly): 'But every schoolboy will tell you, sir, that the clouds are recruited from the sea.'

Dr. Mackay (contemptuously): 'I have already fully mastered the scientific knowledge that is usually taught in schools.'

The Juryman: 'I can scarcely credit it.'

The Coroner (to the Juryman): 'Moderate your language, sir. You must conduct yourself with propriety. Dr. Mackay must be treated with all respect.'

The coroner then went on, for the benefit of the astonished juryman, to put in a few words of indulgent explanation as to why rain-water was not saline.

Dr. Peters, Professor Green, F.R.S., and Mr. Andrew James, F.R.S., having given their corroborative evidence, Inspector Murray was recalled, and continued his story. He had had considerable difficulty in inducing Mrs. Ashfield to come up to London, she taking him for a lunatic (half-hearted laughter); but at last he managed to persuade her of his sanity, and that his tale was a true one. In order to spare her any unnecessary shock, he had had her shown the clothes separately, including the watch-chain and the pencil-case found on the deceased, all of which, after a very natural hesitation, she identified as her husband's. He asked her if she were strong enough to see the face of the deceased, and she decided to go through with the ordeal at once. On sight of the dead face she had shrieked 'Robert!' and become unconscious. He had also taken further steps, and the body had been identified as that of their employer by several of the clerks of the Leadenhall Street office, and by the servants at Colombo Hall.

Inspector White, of Scotland Yard, said that, in consequence of the suggestion that the deceased was a lunatic at large, every lunatic asylum in the

kingdom had been communicated with, and the description of the deceased given the widest circulation. Up to that moment no information had been received that might give colour to the said suggestion in the slightest degree.

Mr. Howell Jones, a fine-art publisher, said he lived with his family at Acacia Villa. His side-window overlooked the roof of Mr. Clinton's studio. He remembered the storm of Wednesday night very well, as it had kept him awake. He had heard the terrible crash, of which he now knew the cause. He had not felt himself called upon to rise and examine into it at the time. Any suggestion that the deceased had jumped or had been thrown from one of his windows was absolutely ridiculous. He was a resident of the highest respectability, and a member of the vestry, having, with his family, occupied his present residence for upwards of fifteen years.

The Coroner: 'Is it not possible that the deceased may have been hidden in your house without your knowledge and consent?'

The Witness: 'I'd eat my head if he were.'

The Coroner: 'That is not a proper answer.'

The Witness: 'This is the first time my word has been doubted since I've resided in St. John's Wood. And I can remember the time, too, when all the surrounding district — Hampstead and

Kilburn—was all open country. I used to walk in the fields on Sunday mornings.'

The Coroner: 'You are wandering from the point. It is of the highest importance that the possibility of the deceased having previously been in your house should be either excluded or admitted.'

The Witness (excitedly): 'The deceased most certainly was never in my house.'

The Coroner: 'Yours is the only house which has windows overlooking the studio, is it not?'

The Witness: 'There are others, but at a distance.'

The Coroner: 'What do you call a distance?'

The Witness: 'A considerable distance.'

The Coroner: 'The deceased might have got on to your roof?'

The Witness: 'That I can't say.'

A Juryman: 'I have noticed that the house next to yours is to let at present.'

The Witness: 'That is so. I am the landlord.'

In reply to further questions, he could not deny that the deceased might have effected an entry into the empty house, whence he could easily have got on to the roof. Taken to task by the coroner for wasting the court's time by the disrespectful guardedness of his answers, the witness complained there was an obvious suggestion that

he—an influential resident and vestryman of fifteen years' standing, and a considerable owner of property in the neighbourhood of St. John's Wood—was implicated in this matter. His house had been watched, and even his servants questioned by detectives, and he naturally resented it.

The Coroner: 'I am sorry you should get that impression. I am here in accordance with the law, and it is my business to conduct this investigation so as to leave nothing undone that may throw any light on this difficult matter, and a man of the experience and standing you profess to have ought to do his best to assist me.'

The witness retired, looking very sulky.

James Milton, tailor's manager, next deposed that he went with Inspector Murray to see the body, the latter having informed him that the clothes of the deceased were marked with the name of his firm. The resemblance of the deceased to a customer of theirs was so striking that he would have unhesitatingly mentioned the name if the identity of the two, for reasons now well known, had not struck him as an absolute impossibility.

The Coroner: 'On being pressed by Inspector Murray, you mentioned what was passing in your mind?'

The Witness: 'I did. He perceived I had been about to speak, and he insisted on my doing so. I told him, though, of course, that I looked

on the resemblance of the deceased to Mr. Robert Ashfield as the merest coincidence.'

The Coroner: 'Mr. Ashfield was known to you as a wealthy City merchant, and as residing at Colombo Hall, Finchley Road?'

The Witness: 'That is so.'

The Coroner: 'How long is it since Mr. Ashfield became a customer of yours?'

The Witness: 'He has dealt with us for the past eight years.'

The Coroner: 'How frequently used you to see him?'

The Witness: 'That is a difficult question to answer. Sometimes we might not see or hear from him for six months; sometimes he might call twice in a month. At other times I used to go to see him at his office on receipt of a post-card from him.'

The Coroner: 'Apart from this business relation, I take it Mr. Ashfield was not known to you?'

The Witness: 'He was only known to me as a client of the firm, and I never saw him except on business occasions and for business purposes.'

The Coroner: 'On the whole, I might take it that you saw Mr. Ashfield about as frequently as my own tailor sees me—on an average half a dozen times a year.'

The Witness (after some consideration): 'About that.'

The Coroner: 'And do you think that would make you so familiar with every detail as to enable you with certainty to identify a body submitted to you?'

The Witness: 'I certainly knew him well—quite well enough to be able to make the statement I did to Mr. Murray, which was far more qualified than the one your Honour attributes to me.'

The Coroner: 'I did not attribute to you any statement at all. I merely wished to ascertain the exact extent of your personal knowledge of Mr. Ashfield's appearance.'

The Intellectual-looking Juryman: 'I do not think I could identify my tailor if his body were submitted to me.'

The Witness: 'Perhaps you are ashamed of him.'

The Coroner: 'You must not be personal, sir.' (After a pause) 'I doubt whether I myself could identify my tailor's body.'

The Witness: 'I beg your pardon, sir, but I make bold to assert that your tailor could identify your body.' (Half-suppressed laughter.)

The Coroner (resuming): 'You found that the clothes were made by your firm?'

The Witness: 'With the exception of the overcoat.'

The Coroner: 'Did you remember at the

time making that particular suit for Mr. Ashfield?'

The Witness: 'No; but I afterwards verified a suit had been made for Mr. Ashfield that answered to the description in every respect.'

In reply to further questions, witness stated the suit he referred to was delivered to Mr. Ashfield some weeks ago. He was perfectly certain the overcoat was not of their make.

The Coroner: 'Had you no other customer at all who bore some resemblance to Mr. Ashfield?'

The Witness: 'Most certainly not.'

The coroner then intimated that they should close the day's proceedings with a visit to the studio.

'In ordinary circumstances,' he went on, 'they might ere now have closed the investigation, as such witnesses as could in any way speak directly as to the matter under inquiry—to wit, the causes and circumstances under which the deceased met with his death—had already been examined. As he had warned them, some of the evidence even seemed to diverge from the main question; but it would be seen at the next sitting that such evidence did really bear upon the issue to be determined. The peculiar features presented by the case would render it necessary for them to take a good deal more such evidence—evidence which at first sight would appear to have bearing on a totally distinct

matter, but which, nevertheless, would be found to be of the highest importance to the present investigation. In the course of to-day's hearing he had received several letters relating to the case, and, as one or two of the writers had important evidence to offer, he would adjourn the inquiry to Thursday next, to give them an opportunity of being present.'

Mrs. Ashfield left the court on the arm of her lady companion. She bowed to Clinton as she went past, and he returned the courtesy with respectful sympathy.

CHAPTER V.

At the reassembling of the coroner's court, Mrs. Ashfield did not appear till just before the opening of the day's proceedings, and she was accompanied by the same elderly lady as before. As the only available places were next to Clinton, they took their seats there, and had time to exchange just a few words with him. Mrs. Ashfield's companion, he learnt, was Mrs. Norton, an aunt of hers.

Mrs. Ashfield herself looked much broken; but he was impressed with the restrained gentleness of her manner and her soft, pleasant voice. She explained to him that the case was being watched by counsel—Mr. Barrett Spencer—on behalf of herself and stepsons, as her late husband's solicitors had strongly advised this course. She herself, of course, assented to all their suggestions, though she did not understand their reasons, and would be thankful when all was over.

Inspector Richardson continued to watch the

case for the police, and Mr. Howell Jones had also called in counsel to represent his interests.

Mrs. Ashfield was first called. She deposed that she was the wife of Robert Ashfield, of Leadenhall Street and Colombo Hall, Finchley Road. She had been married to him for four years. She had seen her husband on board the Ostend boat on the Wednesday night, and that was the last she had seen of him. That was all the light she could throw on the matter.

In response to a red-haired juryman, who suddenly became morbidly inquisitive, and, despite the lukewarm protests of the coroner that many of these details were not to the point (for he was obviously interested in them), Mrs. Ashfield recounted minutely all the circumstances of her husband's departure. Mr. Ashfield had first told her of his intended journey on the Saturday. At first he had thought of crossing to Ostend alone; but on Tuesday evening it was settled they should make the trip together. Her husband went to the City as usual that morning, it having been arranged she should go direct to the station in a cab, bringing all luggage with her. They were to stay at Ostend for two days, and she had therefore packed only a very small trunk besides the hand-bags. Her husband was to dine in the City previous to meeting her at the station. About three o'clock she received a telegram from

him, saying 'Don't forget the new Krupp razor.' She had found the telegram crumpled in her pocket, and had it with her.

The Coroner: 'I see this was handed in at Eastcheap at 2.20 p.m.'

The Witness: 'My husband was in the habit of lunching at a restaurant near the post-office, where he could get a game of chess.'

Continuing, witness said that when she arrived at Cannon Street Station she did not see her husband. She was nervous and afraid of missing him in the fog, which was getting worse each moment. She had the luggage wheeled into the station, but she did not care to take the tickets and get the trunk registered until he came. When he at last appeared, they had only twenty minutes to spare, though her husband, who was an experienced traveller, pooh-poohed her nervousness. She begged him not to go at all, because of the terrible fog; but he replied that he did not think it would be foggy at Dover.

He was rather cross, she was afraid. He complained that he had had a long day, and had not been able to get away from the office in time to dine. He had even hurried off without washing, knowing she would be waiting for him and fidgeting. He gave her two five-pound notes, and whilst she took the tickets and saw the luggage registered, he went to get a hasty wash and brush-

up. He said he had made a fair lunch, so that he was strong enough to wait till they got to Dover, when he would eat a substantial meal, either on board the boat or at the hotel. When they arrived at Dover there was no fog, but the sky was black, and she was too nervous to proceed. Her husband decided to go on. She gave her two valises to a porter, and bade him carry them off the quay to the Lord Warden Hotel. A sailor carried her husband's things on to the boat, and put them on a bench. She did not stay more than a minute on board, as, though the boat was on the calm side of the breakwater, it heaved a little, and the smell of the steam made her giddy. She said good-bye to her husband, and went off the boat. She went immediately to the hotel. She remembered she was much frightened by the roaring of the wind, and feared she had given the hotel people some trouble.

She first heard the terrible news the next morning. She was completely prostrated by it, but when she grew calmer she refused to give up all hope. Inquiries were instituted by cable, when it was ascertained that all who had gone off the boat and given up their landing-tickets had had hand-luggage at least. On the assumption that he had landed, inquiries were made at every hotel, and in the town; but the result only confirmed the worst.

She had agreed to accompany Inspector Murray to town mainly because she already intended to leave Dover that day, though she thought his story the absurdest nonsense. As Mr. Murray had promised to show her the clothes first, she was sure they would not be her husband's, and that therefore she would not have to look at the strange body, the very idea of which was horrible to her, considering how prostrated she was. But the clothes were undoubtedly those her husband had worn on Wednesday. She was much frightened and upset at the sight of the face of the deceased —the whole thing seemed so weird to her.

Interrogated about the overcoat, she did not know when or where her husband had bought it. As far as she could remember, he had been wearing it for several weeks. Her husband made it a point to look very carefully after his wardrobe. He was a most methodical man.

The Coroner: 'Do you know how much money your husband had on his person?'

The Witness: 'I can't say. He was not likely to be short when taking such a trip.'

The Coroner: 'Would he not have had some pocket-book?'

The Witness: 'He usually carried one. It was of black leather, and bore his initials in silver.'

The Coroner: 'The boat did not start immediately after you went off?'

The Witness: 'I should not think so. They were still busy putting luggage on board. I did not stay, but went straight off the quay. A porter let me through a side-gate.'

A Juryman: 'Is it not possible your husband went off the boat after you had gone to your hotel?'

The Witness: 'I suppose that is possible, if he had had a mind to. But he was bent on crossing.'

The Coroner: 'Was he a good sailor?'

The Witness: 'I believe so. He has told me he never got ill. He has made the voyage to Ceylon several times.'

The Coroner: 'Have you ever accompanied him?'

The Witness: 'Since our marriage he has never travelled farther than the Continent; but he was planning to take me on a visit to his Ceylon estate next spring, to see his two sons.'

Coroner (kindly): 'And you no doubt looked forward to it with pleasure?'

The Witness (sobbing): 'I did.'

When Mrs. Ashfield, who had been much affected, and had broken down several times whilst giving her evidence, had recovered herself, the intellectual-looking juryman stood up consequentially.

The Intellectual-looking Juryman: 'Is it within your knowledge whether Mr. Ashfield had a twin brother?' (Sensation.)

The Witness: 'Yes, Mr. Ashfield has a twin brother.' (Great sensation in court.)

The Coroner (to the juryman): 'Mr. Cyrus Ashfield is present in court, and will be called upon in due course.' (A laugh heard.)

The intellectual-looking juryman bowed and took his seat again, looking somewhat crestfallen.

The coroner having congratulated the witness on the admirable and clear way in which she had given her evidence in this most painful and trying matter, Mrs. Ashfield resumed her place next to Clinton.

William Howard, footman, deposed that he last saw his master on Wednesday morning, when Mr. Ashfield left for business as usual. He had at once identified the deceased as his master.

The Coroner: 'You knew your master would be away for several days?'

The Witness: 'Not till the last moment, sir. I helped Mr. Ashfield on with his coat in the hall, and then he said to me: "You know I shall not be home to-night, Howard. I'm running across to the Continent." I said, "How about your luggage, sir?" and he answered, "Oh, the missus will be looking after that!"

The Coroner (smiling): 'Are you sure he said "the missus"?'

The Witness (also smiling): 'Well, he might have said "Mrs. Ashfield."'

The Coroner: 'Was there no further conversation?'

The Witness: 'No, sir.'

The Coroner: 'You remember how Mr. Ashfield was dressed at the time?'

The Witness: 'Yes, sir. He was wearing the clothes shown me by Inspector Murray.'

Albert Rands stated he was the chief clerk in Mr. Ashfield's employment. He had known his employer's intention of making the journey to Ostend for a day or two beforehand, as there was no chance of Mr. Wilton returning in time to the office. Mr. Wilton was the clerk who usually went across. Mr. Ashfield left the office on the Wednesday evening about half-past eight. It had been a very busy day, and they had all been detained late. His employer was rather cross at the end, hurrying them all, and complaining that if they were not faster he would have no time to dine. He had gone off in a great hurry. Witness remained at the office half an hour longer to get things cleared up. He was under the impression that Mr. Ashfield intended to get something to eat in a rush. He remarked to Mr. Thompson that Mr. Ashfield would do better to wait till he got to the boat, instead of choking himself by bolting down his food. He had since identified

both the body of the deceased and the clothes as those of his employer.

The Coroner: 'Did you know that Mr. Ashfield was going to meet his wife?'

The Witness: 'I gathered he was, though he did not tell me so directly. He stopped suddenly in the midst of dictating a letter to Mr. Thompson, and said, "Confound it! I hope Nellie will think of putting in the new razor." Then he laughed to himself, and said, "Oh, of course she will; I forgot I sent her a message about it."'

The Coroner: 'The remark was obviously not intended for anybody but himself.'

The Witness: 'It was not for me to say anything.'

A Juryman: 'Was Mr. Ashfield popular among his clerks?'

The Witness (after some hesitation): 'I don't think he was actually liked. He was very strict, but he was not unjust. He was not exactly disliked.'

The Coroner (in a gossipy tone): 'I take it he would not talk to his subordinates about his domestic arrangements'

The Witness: 'No. Not a word of anything but business was spoken in the office from morning till evening. None of the clerks would venture to presume on Mr. Ashfield. He made you feel

you must keep your distance, and you never forgot he was the master.'

Alfred Thompson, clerk in Mr. Ashfield's office, corroborated the last witness. His employer wrote out a cheque for twenty-five pounds on his private account before going to lunch, leaving him instructions to cash it for three five-pound notes and ten pounds in gold. That was at half-past one. Mr. Ashfield returned at half-past two, and witness handed him the money.

The Coroner: 'Did you notice where Mr. Ashfield put the money away?'

The Witness: 'Yes, sir. He put the notes carefully into his pocket-book, and the gold into his purse.'

The Coroner: 'Can you say to which pockets Mr. Ashfield replaced them?'

The Witness: 'He put back his purse into his right-hand trousers pocket, and the pocket-book into his inner breast-pocket.'

Asked if he recognised the purse produced, witness could not say so for sure, though he believed it was the one he had seen in Mr. Ashfield's possession. The pocket-book was of black leather, and closed with an elastic band. The initials, 'R. A.,' were embossed on it in silver.

A Juryman: 'If a man were struggling in the water, such a pocket-book might easily be lost?'

The Witness: 'I should think so.'

The Coroner: 'Undoubtedly. It has often occurred to me that my own pocket-book has slipped out of my inner breast-pocket from the mere act of stooping. Do you know whether Mr. Ashfield was in the habit of keeping many papers in his pocket-book?'

The Witness: 'Undoubtedly there were papers, but I do not know how many.'

'Elias,' Esq., was then called, and came forward in his Salvation Army uniform.

The Coroner: 'What is your surname?'

The Witness (trembling violently): 'I don't know, sir.'

The Coroner (gently): 'Come, my good man; you don't know your own name?'

The Witness: 'Everybody calls me Elias.

The Coroner: 'Very well, then, Elias. You have been employed a long time by Mr. Clinton?'

The Witness: 'God bless him!'

The Coroner: 'Did you ever tell anybody that your master intended to go abroad?'

The Witness (trembling again): 'Me? No, sir.'

The Coroner: 'Or that he had gone abroad?'

The Witness: 'No, sir.'

The Coroner: 'Tell me what you've been doing all this time.'

The Witness: 'I picked up an odd job here and there.'

Mr. Barker, the barrister-at-law representing Mr. Howell Jones, here rose.

Mr. Barker: 'Did you know the top-light at the back could be opened?'

The Witness: 'Yes, sir; I used to clean it.'

Mr. Barker: 'Used you to get on to the roof?'

The Witness: 'Yes, sir.'

Mr. Barker: 'What were you doing on the Wednesday evening?'

The Witness: 'I was preaching the word of God.'

Mr. Barker: 'Had you ever seen Mr. Ashfield?'

The Witness: 'I did a job for him last week.'

Mr. Barker (puzzled): 'Where did you see him?'

The Witness: 'At the shop.'

Mr. Barker: 'What shop?'

The Witness: 'In Canterbury Road, round the corner from me.'

The Coroner: 'He doubtless means Mr. Cyrus Ashfield, the twin brother of Mr. Robert Ashfield, who will be called in due course.'

Mr. Barker: 'I have no further questions to put.'

The inquiry was again adjourned until the morrow.

CHAPTER VI.

THE third day's proceedings began with the examination of John Hanwell, stationmaster, who deposed that the S.E.R. boat train arrived alongside the boat twelve minutes after eleven, which was, no doubt, somewhat late. There were rather above the average number of passengers for the time of the year. The boat did not leave till about a quarter to twelve, as a heavy mail had to be got aboard. The passengers went on board as usual, crowding to the gangway. He did not take any particular notice of them, though he did see a lady come off as soon as the gangway was clear. He himself helped her to step from it on to the quay. He did not notice her face then. He had no hesitation, all the same, in now recognising Mrs. Ashfield as the lady.

The Coroner: 'Did any other people go on board after that?'

The Witness: 'There were the men employed at the station, who may have gone on and off,

and there were two or three gentlemen who were talking, and who went on board a little later. I did not pay very close attention to them.'

The Coroner: 'Quite a considerable time must have elapsed after Mrs. Ashfield's leaving the boat before the gangway was pulled up?'

The Witness: 'A good time, sir. The bell was rung, as usual, before the gangway was hauled in.'

The Coroner: 'Now, in that time anyone who chose might have left the ship?' (Sensation.)

The Witness: 'There was nothing to stop anybody.'

The Coroner: 'I take it that friends go on board to see the passengers off?'

The Witness: 'Yes, sir; but very few on dark winter nights. Passengers' friends would, of course, come off when the bell rang.'

The Coroner: 'And were there many that night?'

The Witness: 'So far as I noticed, there were four people came off after the bell—two gentlemen, and then a lady and gentleman together.'

The Coroner: 'Others might have come off before the usual warning?'

The Witness: 'They might have come off, sir; but, as I've told you, sir, I can't say anything about that.'

The Coroner: 'How would people leave the quay?'

The Witness: 'They would have to walk right down to the end, when a porter would let them through the side-gate.'

The Coroner: 'So that all who left the quay would have to come under his observation?'

The Witness: 'Yes, sir. He is put there to see that nobody comes on to the quay who has no business there.'

The witness, continuing, explained that the quay was part of the Admiralty Pier. There was an upper promenade communicating with the quay by several staircases. The promenade was always open to the public, and most of the day the quay as well. Ordinarily, people could ascend from the quay to the promenade by these stairways, and thence walk off the pier without coming under the observation of the doorkeeper. But during train times the public were altogether excluded from the quay, all communication with the upper promenade being cut off by the locking of all the doors.

The Coroner: 'Is it not possible that by some oversight one of the doors may have been left unlocked, thus giving access to one of the stairways?'

The Witness: 'I do not think so.'

The Coroner: 'What time did the next train leave for London?'

The Witness: 'One-fifty, sir. It would take up the passengers from the first night boat.'

A Juryman: 'There is absolutely no train to London earlier than that?'

The Witness: 'None, sir.'

Thomas Plumstead, porter, deposed that he was on duty at the gate on the Wednesday night in question. He let several people in through the gate, but only a few out. He remembered William, his mate, carrying some things out. William told him they were for a lady who was coming on in a minute. He let the lady through soon after. Afterwards two gentlemen passed out, and then a lady and a gentleman. The last gentleman was a very stout party. The first two were both tall. He heard one say to the other, 'This way, dad.'

The Coroner: 'You are perfectly sure you noticed everybody who passed out?'

The Witness: 'Certainly, sir.'

The Coroner: 'You were not talking to anybody?'

The Witness: 'Only to—— No, sir; nobody in particular.'

The Coroner: 'Oh, then you *were* talking to somebody?'

The Witness (uneasily): 'Yes, sir.'

The Coroner: 'How, then, were you able to observe people so carefully?'

The Witness: 'I was only talking just for a moment, sir.'

The Coroner: 'To whom were you talking?'

The Witness (hesitating): 'To Mr. Barham, sir.'

The Coroner; 'Who is Mr. Barham?'

The Witness (very uneasily): 'He's a—a—a—he's a hairynawrt.'

The Coroner (puzzled): 'A hairy what?'

The Witness (loudly): 'A hairynawr-r-r-t!'

The Coroner (his face lighting up): 'An aëronaut, you mean.'

The Witness: 'Yes, sir.'

The Coroner: 'What was he doing on the quay?'

The Witness (hesitating): 'He only came on for a chat.'

Questioned by a juryman, witness said he knew Mr. Barham well. Mr. Barham was a respectable resident in the town.

Thomas Burnside Porter, a commercia traveller, of well-fed, jovial appearance, deposed, in rather a breezy fashion, that he knew Mr. Robert Ashfield well, having lunched often at the same restaurant in Eastcheap. They had played chess together sometimes. Witness crossed to Ostend on the Wednesday night. Shortly before midnight he went on deck to have a smoke. That was soon after the boat started. The

weather had not yet begun to be terrible. He found Mr. Ashfield looking over the side, and was delighted to see him. '"Didn't expect to meet you on board, Ashfield," said I,' continued the witness cheerfully. '"Have a cigar?" "Thankee," says he; "the weather ain't so bad after all. Pity my missus wouldn't come any further." "I've crossed in worse weather than this," says I; and then we talked a bit about trade, and about this, that, and the other. "It's a bit cold for me up here," says I at last. "Come down and have a drink." "No, thankee," says he; "I think I'll stay here a bit longer. I'm fond of the water, and it's not often I get a chance nowadays. Perhaps next year I'll be able to go out and see my boys." "Well, I don't feel quite so poetical about the water as you," says I. "I'm going after the whisky."' (Laughter, at which the witness seemed highly pleased.) 'I got a little bit sick afterwards, when it began to pitch and toss and heave up and down. Oh my!' (Laughter.)

The Coroner: 'What time was it when you left him?'

The Witness: 'I should say it must have been about half an hour past midnight. We must have talked about thirty-five to forty minutes. Any way, we both finished our cigars.'

The Coroner: 'You never saw him again?'

The Witness: 'No, poor fellow! I looked for him in the morning, as I thought it would be jolly to put up at the same hotel.'

The Coroner: 'You wrote to me all this in a letter?'

The Witness: 'Yes; I was telling some gentlemen about it at the hotel, and they said I ought to let the coroner know. For my part, I didn't see what good that could do, as it couldn't bring the poor chap back to life. But as it couldn't do any harm, I thought I might as well. It wasn't convenient for me to come as a witness before to-day, as I've only just got back to England.'

A Juryman: 'You are certain you knew Mr. Ashfield well enough to make no mistake?'

The Witness: 'Lord bless you! Why, I knew the poor gentleman as well as I know my own mother.'

Captain Walter Brown gave evidence of his boat leaving the Admiralty Pier at a quarter to twelve on the Wednesday. The night was dark and the wind fresh. The sea ran rather high. Between half-past twelve and one the wind began to rise, and the boat encountered tempestuous seas. About one o'clock a heavy sea broke over her, doing considerable damage to the deck-house. The passage took a little over five hours. He was first informed of the missing passenger about three-quarters of an hour after they had arrived.

The trunk labelled 'Robert Ashfield' was left unclaimed in the Customs inspection-room, and the other effects of the passenger had been left on board. One of the men had picked them up all wet in the gutter at the side of the deck shortly after one, and had taken them down to the lower deck. They had evidently been intercepted by the side of the ship from being washed away. He thought it advisable to cable over a statement to Dover.

Jerry Davis, seaman, deposed to finding on deck a handbag, dressing-case, rug, umbrella, and walking-cane, and removing them below. The handbag and dressing-case bore the initials 'R. A.'

James Hedley, steward, stated he had no recollection of having served any supper to a gentleman answering to the description of Mr. Robert Ashfield. There were only two or three gentlemen who sat down to a full meal, and his impression certainly was that Mr. Ashfield was not one of them.

Mr. Cyrus Ashfield, corn, flour and seed merchant, stated he was the twin-brother of Mr. Robert Ashfield. He resided and carried on business at Canterbury Road, Kilburn. His was a small retail business. He was a widower. He had no children. At Inspector Richardson's request, he told what he knew of his brother's

career. His brother had gone out to India at the age of fifteen, and had entered the office of a tea-merchant; had risen in the firm, and had at length remained sole surviving partner. He had no idea of his brother's fortune. They had never quarrelled, though it was true they saw each other but seldom—not more than half a dozen times a year. All the same, he had always felt cordial towards his brother, and he had no reason to doubt that his brother reciprocated the sentiment. On the few occasions his brother had asked him to dine, there had been no other guests present. It was quite possible his brother was just a little bit ashamed of him, but he himself had never any desire to know his brother's rich friends. He was forty-eight years of age.

The Coroner: 'You are supposed to bear a great resemblance to your brother?'

The Witness: 'Yes, sir; that is usually the case with twins.'

The Coroner: 'Have you ever been taken for him?'

The Witness: 'When we were boys we were always being confused.'

A Juryman: 'The man Elias is known to you?'

The Witness: 'Yes; he is employed by me whenever I can find anything for him to do.'

The Juryman: 'You know nothing of his character?'

The Witness: 'I know nothing that is not in his favour.'

Another Juryman: 'Are you benefiting under Mr. Robert Ashfield's will?'

Mr. Spencer (Barrister-at-Law): 'I am here to represent Mr. Ashfield's family—his sons, who have been communicated with by cable, as well as Mrs. Ashfield. I do not think that any question bearing on the testamentary disposition of Mr. Ashfield's fortune should be raised in the present investigation.'

The Coroner: 'The witness need not answer the question unless he chooses.'

The Witness: 'I have always known that I should be left three thousand pounds. I had it direct from my brother. But I do not know why I am here at all, or what bearing on the case my evidence has. I have passed three days in court away from my business, though I know nothing at all of the circumstances under which my brother met his death.'

Inspector Richardson here rose again and asked: 'Is there any truth in the report that you have another twin-brother alive?'

The Coroner (raising his eyebrows): 'What! Triplets!'

Inspector Richardson (mysteriously): 'Come, now. Admit it is possible. It doesn't follow that you know of his existence.'

The Witness: 'Anything is possible.'

The Coroner: 'Have you another brother at all?'

The Witness: 'I have always supposed not.'

The Coroner: 'I presume, Mr. Richardson, you have merely hypothetical ground for your question?'

Inspector Richardson: 'I wanted to elicit a fact which would be useful.'

The Coroner: 'If it were a fact.'

A Juryman (to Witness): 'Within your knowledge, was Mr. Robert Ashfield a Theosophist, or at all inclined that way?'

The Witness: 'I do not know anything of my brother's religious opinions.'

Mrs. Ashfield, recalled, said that, to the best of her knowledge and belief, her husband had no other brother.

The same Juryman: 'Can you say whether your husband was a Theosophist, or at all inclined that way?'

Mrs. Ashfield: 'I am certain he was not. He thought their so-called marvels were the merest trickery.'

The Juryman: 'Possibly he has found out his mistake by now.'

This closed the examination of the witnesses, and the coroner proceeded at once with his summing-up.

'Gentlemen,' he began impressively, 'you will recollect I mentioned to you at the commencement of the present investigation that the case into which it was our business to inquire was likely to present some very remarkable features, and I deemed it best the usual formal identification of the body of the deceased, previous to the examination of the witnesses, should be omitted. I foresaw that the evidence of nearly every one of the large number of witnesses examined during the three days of our sitting would have some bearing on the identification of the body, and that the evidence of the later witnesses would tend, apparently, to nullify that of the earlier ones. I therefore proceeded at once to investigate the circumstances under which the deceased met with his death, foreseeing that, if any identification of the body were possible at all, it must be established in the course of the inquiry.

'Let us now look at the circumstances of the case as they arose. Mr. John Clinton, an artist of considerable repute, finds it necessary, for the benefit of his health, to leave the raw mists and fogs of London, so trying at the present season' —here the coroner cleared his throat elaborately —'and to betake himself to the South of France, where he intends to enjoy a protracted holiday. A week after he has left he is unexpectedly re-

called to town, and, fatigued by a long journey and a rough Channel passage, he hastens to his studio and at once retires.

'He has arrived home about half-past ten; let us say eleven o'clock has struck by the time he has got to bed. It is an unpleasant night—dark and misty—and he hears the rain beating against his roof. The wind, too, begins to rise, and Mr. Clinton, weak and ill as he is, slumbers but fitfully.

'But he is not fated to enjoy his much-needed rest for long. He is roused, apparently in the very depth of night, by the body of the deceased crashing through the top-light of the back part of his studio. He listens, and he hears the heavy rain pouring onto the floor. But, though he fears that some grave damage has been done, as yet he does not suspect the terrible shock that awaits him. When, however, he has risen and finds what really has happened, he does not lose his presence of mind. His first impulse is one of humanity. The man lying there must be extricated immediately, and his sufferings alleviated. With an effort, Mr. Clinton raises the body and places it on a chair, unaware, in the excitement of the moment, that he has himself been severely cut, and quite insensible to the pain. But a very cursory examination of the body is conclusive. The face alone speaks its ghastly tale, and, Mr.

Clinton's spurt of strength abandoning him, he falls to the ground unconscious.

'Mr. Clinton has not consulted his watch, nor can he say how long he has lain in the swoon, and we are therefore only able to fix the time of the occurrence more or less approximately. It is a little after two o'clock in the morning before information of the occurrence reaches Inspector Murray, and I think we may fairly assume that about an hour has elapsed since Mr. Clinton was first awakened from his slumbers, though I myself wish it were possible to determine the time of that event with a greater degree of exactitude. Mr. Clinton unfortunately has only the vaguest recollection of the after-events, but from the trail of blood-marks along the studio floor right into the bath-room, and from the fact that the cut and blood-stained slippers were found there, it is clear that Mr. Clinton dragged his bleeding feet there for the purpose of throwing some more clothes round him previous to emerging into the terrible weather to seek assistance. And, indeed, Mr. Clinton was in a deplorable condition when Inspector Murray, accompanied by the divisional surgeon, Dr. Mackay, eventually arrived upon the scene. His boots were unlaced, and had evidently been pulled on over his bare and wounded feet, and his cloak was the only garment that covered his shoulders. Dr. Mackay, having

formally satisfied himself that life was extinct in the deceased, very properly gave his attention to Mr. Clinton.

'Inspector Murray has put before us a full statement of the condition in which he found the deceased. The idea first entertained by Mr. Clinton, that the body was that of a housebreaker, who had somehow ascertained that the owner of the studio was away from home, seemed to be strongly negatived by its appearance. The clothes were those of a gentleman. A gold watch was found in his pockets, a gold pencil-case, and a purse containing £11 in gold besides some silver.

'So far the case is clear and straightforward. The difficulties it offers would be adequately met by an identification of the deceased; and if there had been no further complications, there is no reason to question that such identification would have been effected through the publicity the matter had attained. It was very reasonably suggested in some quarters that the deceased was a lunatic who had escaped the vigilance of his friends or keepers. The police were willing to take notice of and to act upon every suggestion that seemed of any value at all, and they accordingly, as Inspector White, of Scotland Yard, has informed you, circulated a photograph and the fullest particulars of the deceased among all the

asylums in the kingdom, but entirely without result.

'In the meanwhile, Dr. Mackay had been making his examination of the body, and now we find that the case begins to assume amazing and baffling aspects that certainly make it unprecedented in the whole of my experience. You have heard Dr. Mackay tell you that from the very first the body of the deceased impressed him as presenting every indication of death from suffocation by drowning—a strange and startling fact, having regard to the circumstances under which it had been found. A further examination but confirms Dr. Mackay in his first impression. Both the lips and the nostrils of the corpse are covered with a thick, frothy mucus. The body is quite cold; the eyelids are half closed, and the pupil dilated.

'Unwilling to rely on his own judgment in so extraordinary a case, Dr. Mackay calls in the assistance of Dr. Peters. That distinguished gentleman has told you that, like Dr. Mackay, he was forced to the conclusion that the immediate cause of death was suffocation by drowning. The lungs, on examination, prove to be spongy and distended, and to contain much froth. The stomach, too, is found to be full of water—and, mark you, gentlemen, the death could not have taken place before immersion, else, as has been

amply and admirably explained to you by Dr. Mackay and Dr. Peters, such a condition of the stomach and lungs could not have been brought about at all. That condition is the result of certain acts on the part of the drowning person whilst still alive—to wit, convulsive attempts to breathe. This completely does away with any suggestion that the deceased met his death otherwise than by drowning. We have further to bear in mind that it was no ordinary water found in the stomach, but sea-water. And, as the fluid in the stomach of a drowned man always corresponds with the fluid in which he has been immersed, it follows that the deceased met his death by drowning at sea. As if the developments of the case were not already sufficiently astounding without this last-mentioned fact to complicate it still more!

'Two Fellows of the Royal Society are called in—no less distinguished gentlemen than Professor Green and Mr. Andrew James. These eminent analysts have put before you the result of their investigations. Not only have they corroborated the medical evidence to the full, but they have also ascertained in addition that the very garments of the deceased were saturated with sea-water.

'I have before remarked that it must have been about one o'clock when Mr. Clinton was first roused. The medical evidence is not inconsistent

with the fact that death took place just about this time. I say "not inconsistent," because necessarily the medical evidence is not very definite on this point. Under normal circumstances a doctor can only say approximately how long life has been extinct. With the present extraordinary features superadded to the case, a doctor would naturally hesitate still more to speak definitely. Here, from one point of view, the evidence bearing directly on the case seems to end. But now we approach the most astounding development of the whole matter. Inspector Murray, in the course of his efforts to establish the identity of the deceased, chanced on a strange link that appeared to connect this case with another lamentable occurrence, which, to all appearance, had been totally distinct and independent. I refer, gentlemen, to the loss of Mr. Robert Ashfield in the Channel on that same memorable night.

'Before dealing, however, with this extraordinary development, I wish to recall to your mind that all the witnesses, so far, had been examined at length, for I was determined to bring to light every point of this mysterious affair, in the hope of detecting some clue that might help us to a perfectly rational solution. Several little things impressed themselves upon me, but as this examination proceeded it became clear they were perfectly irrelevant and accidental, and it was

useless following them further. I refer to such points as my attaching importance to the examination of the man Elias. After hearing the medical evidence, I was quite convinced that the last possibility of the deceased being a housebreaker had completely disappeared, and that Elias could not, wittingly or unwittingly, have spread the information of his master's absence from his studio among questionable characters. From the evidence given by Mr. Howell Jones, it is clear the deceased could not have jumped or been thrown from one of the windows of his house, and, as we ourselves saw during our inspection of the studio, the roof, being over twenty-two feet high, is perfectly inaccessible from the ground. With the possibility of the deceased having been on Mr. Jones's roof I will deal later.

'Let me now briefly review the facts of the loss of Mr. Robert Ashfield in the Channel, as ascertained from the witnesses.

'It has been clearly established that Mr. Ashfield left his office at half-past eight on the Wednesday evening, and went direct, having had no time to dine, to meet his wife at Cannon Street Station.

'At Dover it is considered advisable for Mr. Ashfield to travel alone, and his wife, having seen him on board the boat, says "Good-bye" to him, and immediately repairs to her hotel. On the

boat arriving at Ostend, Mr. Ashfield is missing. His effects are found on board, but there is no one to claim them. Now, it might be suggested that the door for two hypotheses is here left open. First, Mr. Ashfield may have wished to disappear, and he therefore landed quietly and slipped away. The second hypothesis is that he left the boat after his wife had parted from him, and did not cross at all. The first suggestion appears to me ridiculous. Mr. Ashfield was a singularly successful man. He had attained to great wealth, and to a position of consideration in the commercial world. Moreover, he was married to a lady both charming and intelligent, and was looking forward to taking her on a visit to his Ceylon estates and to make the acquaintance of his sons in the coming spring. There is absolutely no foundation for any suggestion that Mr. Ashfield had reason for disappearing or committing suicide. And even if he had left the boat at Dover, he could not have got a train to London before ten minutes to two; and here I want you to remember that the body of the deceased was found by Mr. Clinton about one o'clock, so far as we have been able to determine. Nor could Mr. Ashfield have left the quay without coming under the observation of the doorkeeper, and you have heard the evidence on this point—that no such person passed off the quay on the night in question, and that all the doors that

led to the upper promenade were carefully locked. Finally, unless you have reason for thinking that Mr. Thomas Burnside Porter, who knew Mr. Ashfield well, was mistaken in the identity of the person he conversed with on deck after the boat had started—and to me such a notion seems absurd—the evidence of that gentleman puts the fact of his crossing beyond question. About half-past twelve Mr. Porter goes below, leaving Mr. Ashfield on deck. At one o'clock a tremendous sea breaks over the vessel, doing considerable damage to the deck-house; and shortly after a seaman finds some of Mr. Ashfield's effects lying loose in the gutter at the side of the deck, where they have evidently had a narrow escape of being washed overboard, and removes them to a place of safety. Looking at all these facts, I think we are forced to the conclusion that Mr. Robert Ashfield was, indeed, washed overboard by the sea that broke over the vessel about one o'clock. I should not have been disposed to question the fact at all had not its being so strangely involved with the matter under investigation made it necessary for the strongest searchlight to be thrown on it, and it has been amply confirmed.

'Now, we must face the remarkable problem with which we are confronted. Mr. Ashfield is lost in the Channel about one o'clock, and about the same time, mark you, so far as we are able to

estimate, the body of a man comes crashing through the top-light of Mr. Clinton's studio in St. John's Wood with such force that he brings the whole of the framework—which we have ascertained to have been old and in a rotten condition—and the glass with him to the ground, where he lies amid the wreckage. Submitted to medical examination, the man is proved to have died from suffocation by drowning—not merely drowning, but drowning by sea-water. His garments, too, are found to have been saturated with sea-water. This part of the evidence is unshakable, astonishing and baffling as it may seem. Moreover, it appears to me that the deceased must have fallen from a great height, because if he had been on the roof of the studio, and merely stumbled, I do not conceive it likely he would have wrought such havoc in his fall.

'You have heard how Inspector Murray, by reason of the tailor's name on the frock-coat of the deceased, came to interview Mr. James Milton, and how that gentleman was startled, on being shown the body, by at once recognising the customer whom he had supposed to be lost at sea. That Mr. Milton would not commit himself to asserting the identity is but natural under the circumstances. But not only were the clothes worn by the deceased, with one exception, made by his firm—they were distinctly made for Mr.

Ashfield a few weeks previously. The two principal clerks at Mr. Ashfield's office in Leadenhall Street, and the servants at Colombo Hall, his private residence, were unanimous in identifying their master. The clothes were those worn by him on that memorable Wednesday—the overcoat included, though it is not known where Mr. Ashfield purchased it. The clothes, too, were identified by Mrs. Ashfield as her husband's, and the body immediately after.

'And you must also bear in mind the significant and remarkable fact that, in spite of the great publicity of the whole matter, no independent person or persons have come forward to claim or identify the body of the deceased.

'Were it not, gentlemen, for the extraordinary facts that I have now put before you,' continued the coroner, 'the separate and independent identification of the deceased by so many credible witnesses would have been conclusive. The only ground on which their evidence might be questioned was the possible close, though accidental, resemblance between the deceased and Mr. Robert Ashfield, and that the minds of the witnesses were so impressed by the strange report that had got about that it was very easy for them to be mistaken in their identification.

'The evidence of a hundred witnesses, however sincere and positive, would be of no more

value than the evidence of but a single person if it could be shown they were all similarly affected or mentally predisposed at the time of the event testified to. Many instances to the point are well known to psychologists. But here, you must remember, there is not only a question of physical resemblance. We cannot challenge the identification of the clothes; and, mark you, these were shown to Mrs. Ashfield when she was expecting she would not recognise them—for as yet she had come only to humour Inspector Murray, and she was incredulous about what he had told her. Neither can we challenge the identification of the watch and chain and the gold pencil-case. Then there is the monogram "A" marked on the linen and handkerchiefs.

'Moreover, Mr. Alfred Thompson has told you he went out to cash the cheque whilst his employer had gone to his lunch, and, as we have also learnt, to send a telegram to Mrs. Ashfield, which she duly received. You have heard that Mr. Ashfield put the three five-pound notes in his pocket-book, and the ten pounds in gold into his purse. As I observed during the inquiry, a pocket-book would easily slip out of a breast-pocket and be lost if a man were struggling in the water. And if we assume that Mr. Ashfield had already a little money on his person before drawing the cheque, the amount of money found on the deceased would tally with the amount Mr. Ashfield should have carried with him.

'Lastly, you will remember that both Mr. Ashfield's clerks, as well as Mrs. Ashfield, have told us that Mr. Ashfield left his office too late to dine before going to the station. The steward on the boat has no recollection of having served supper to anybody answering to the description of Mr. Ashfield. Of course, we cannot make any surmise why he did not carry out his original intention of supping on board. But you will observe that, at the time the unfortunate gentleman was washed overboard, nearly twelve hours had elapsed since he had taken any food, and you will find that this agrees with the medical evidence that there was very little food in the stomach of the deceased, which, in consequence, had filled with water. This part of the evidence is very striking. You must also bear in mind that, according to the medical evidence, the contusion on the scalp of the deceased was, from its nature, not likely to have been caused by the head striking the flat floor of the studio, but might have been caused by collision with the edge of the side of the ship, or with a stanchion, as the waves swept over the deck.

'I must also deal with the suggestion indirectly made by Inspector Richardson, that the deceased was some other brother of Mr. Ashfield. Even

if he were, and had, to boot, been foolish enough to be wandering on Mr. Howell Jones's roof in such terrible weather as prevailed at the time, I do not see how his stomach could have got filled with sea-water, or his lungs with froth. Mr. Ashfield's wife and brother have deposed that there were no other brothers, and so I will not further waste your time in examining so idle a surmise.

'Gentlemen, it has been our duty to investigate this amazing and unprecedented affair with a view of arriving at the truth. It would be idle to pretend that the whole of the evidence—the hearing of which has occupied us for three days—does not, from beginning to end, serve to establish a conclusion which is in utter contradiction to the laws of Nature, and which the mind revolts against accepting. But if we are to reject the evidence of all those credible witnesses—and there is not the shadow of a foundation for any suggestion that the witnesses, without exception, were not utterly unbiased, utterly without reason for speaking anything they did not believe to be the truth—and if we are, moreover, to reject the evidence of the many circumstances upon which I have dwelt and which independently substantiate those witnesses, then indeed has the present investigation been the veriest mockery, and our efforts purposeless and ridiculous.

'How, then, shall we decide, placed between two such hopeless alternatives?

'If we accept the conclusion to which we are forced, then must we question our knowledge of the established order of the universe. If we reject it—and we can only do so if we believe the whole of the evidence to be false—then are the efforts of man to ascertain the truth in course of administration of the law of the land both vain and futile.

'I had hoped, indeed, that the case would not turn out as it has when we really came to go into it deeply, but my hope has been disappointed.

'Gentlemen, I will not detain you longer. Yours is the unenviable duty of saying what, in your opinion, was the cause, or causes, of the death of the person found in Mr. Clinton's studio on that memorable Wednesday evening. Yours it will be to determine whether you will accept the evidence of the witnesses whose depositions have been taken, and you will give your verdict accordingly.'

After fifteen minutes' consideration, the jury returned a verdict of 'Found Drowned,' adding that they did not reject the evidence of any of the witnesses.

CHAPTER VII.

'It's an ill wind that blows nobody any good, and the wind that blew poor Ashfield off the boat was no exception, it appears,' said Gerald, as he sat at supper the same evening with Clinton and Ethelyn.

'The good is merely hypothetical, so far,' observed Clinton, his hand playing with a little heap of letters that lay on the table.

'Your vocabulary evidently bears traces of your having attended a coroner's inquest,' said Gerald.

Clinton smiled.

'But, seriously, what am I to answer all these people?' he asked. 'I'm really quite overwhelmed.'

'You'd better parcel out the studio into bits so as to give them all a chance. Each one will claim to be able to show the public the real original spot where the corpse fell. There are only seven applicants. The place is quite big enough.'

'I shouldn't answer any of them,' put in Ethelyn. 'Who would have thought there were such queer people in the world?'

'What! Throw away a chance like that!' exclaimed Gerald. 'Jack's not going to do anything so foolish, especially as we're going to pack him off to Nice again. He's going to take another studio when he comes back, so he may just as well let the old one for the remainder of the term. And a handsome profit he ought to make on it, too.'

Clinton had indeed been surprised by the quantity and strangeness of his correspondence during the last few days. There were at least a hundred requests for permission to see the studio, and, indeed, special police had had to be put on guard there to prevent its being forcibly invaded by the multitudes of the less polite. A minister had written, offering to conduct a special service there; a rich eccentric offered three hundred pounds to have his portrait painted, provided the sittings were in the studio and his chair on the very spot where the body of Mr. Ashfield had fallen. But what particularly bothered Clinton at the moment were the seven letters, asking if he were inclined to sub-let the studio for six months, with all the furniture, the idea being to make a charge of admission to the public.

One of those speculators had seized on him

even as he had emerged from the coroner's court that very afternoon, and, with a confidential, impressive whispering voice, accompanied by gesticulatory forefinger, had endeavoured to drive a hard bargain with him. Gerald had escaped by promising to consider his offer of a hundred pounds.

'A hundred pounds!' ejaculated Gerald contemptuously, as they went on to discuss the various letters. 'You just write to them all round that your price is £250, and the first that puts down the money takes possession of the place. And as for that other morbid idiot, I'm not going to let you stop in London for him. Tell him you'll be happy to paint him next spring, if he cares to wait.'

'And, now that a coroner's jury have decided in favour of a miracle,' said Ethelyn a little later, 'what have you to say about it, Gerald? You haven't yet favoured us with your solution of the mystery. Every day you've been shaking your head solemnly, and saying: "Let us wait and first hear what the jury says!"'

'Well, they've practically declared it to be a miracle,' said Gerald. 'I was wrong in thinking they wouldn't dare to do that. For it is really no small thing to have the courage of one's belief in the supernatural. In the practical affairs of life the whole world is run on atheistical lines. Does

not a wholly materialistic view of the universe underlie all international politics, as the game is played? Religion is only something to be believed. A man is really guided—even if unconsciously—by science, and he wouldn't back religion against science, where his business is concerned, to the extent of a halfpenny. I'm glad a well-authenticated miracle has come along at last. It will teach the world a sharp lesson.'

The young doctor's affectation of cynicism had long since been discounted by the two others, who had not only ceased to take his tirades seriously, but had grown into the habit of being amused by them. To-night there was no mistaking the mockery in his tone.

'Gerald, I'm ashamed of you! I think it's mean of you to try and sneak out like that. And you were so positive last week! The tailor had got Ashfield on the brain, you said.'

'You're not at all generous, Ethelyn, to a fallen adversary,' answered Gerald reproachfully.

'Oh, if you admit you're beaten——' began Ethelyn.

'Did I not admit it unreservedly?' asked Gerald.

'It is impossible ever to tell what you admit or what you don't admit,' retorted Ethelyn. 'If you are caught tripping, you immediately turn at bay and call everybody names for not seeing you

were only joking or sarcastic. Don't you agree with me, Jack dear, that Gerald doesn't fight fair?'

'I simply let him talk—I never fight with him,' said Clinton, laughing.

'You should only hear the awful things he says about women sometimes,' went on Ethelyn. 'You'd *have* to fight with him if you were a woman. He pretends to have no heart, and says love is a disease of the stomach.'

'Which the young of the human species catch as regularly as the measles,' put in Gerald. 'Happily, there is an effectual and never-failing cure for this scourge of mankind. It destroys the disease, root and branch, restores the appetite, and gives back the colour to the complexion. You will observe that the disease has large affinities with indigestion. The cure I need scarcely mention—it begins with an "m."'

'Gerald betrays himself sometimes when he comes to my studio,' said Clinton. 'Then he is frankly emotional, and a picture gives him no pleasure unless there is feeling in it.'

'That is only my politeness, or, rather, professional habit. You see, I have to make myself sweet to patients of every kind of temperament and every shade of opinion, and, by long practice, I am able to adapt myself, at a moment's notice, to any required mood. Five minutes after thundering against those wicked Irishmen, who

want to destroy the integrity of the kingdom, I am, with equal sincerity, drawing tears from the eyes of a Home Ruler's wife by enlarging on Ireland's wrongs. When I go to Jack's studio, I naturally assume an art mood. If Jack were a man of the world instead of a dreamer, our strange agreement on all questions of art would long ago have aroused his suspicions. It is only at my own hearth that I can afford to rest from the masquerade, that I cast from me all the definite and grotesque beliefs, with one or other of which my personality is associated in the mind of each of my patients, retaining only that which is the true expression of myself—that is, Paradox.'

'His bark is worse than his bite,' said Ethelyn. 'I know, because he bit me as he kissed me on the cheek this morning, and it didn't hurt at all.'

'He saves up all the shocking things specially for us,' explained Clinton. 'The poor fellow must find a vent for them some time, and of course he daren't shock his patients.'

'Nonsense!' said Gerald; 'I am simply paying you the compliment of showing you my true self and my true thoughts. I admit both are shocking. Truth always is. You are just like the rest of the world in wanting to have it disguised and decked out with tinsel, cosmetics, and scents. But I really can't allow you to sit up any longer, Jack. Ethelyn's going to write those letters to-night in your name.'

CHAPTER VIII.

THE St. John's Wood wonder still continued to be extraordinary, for, unlike other wonders, it survived the allotted nine days. Whilst John Clinton took his ease in the South of France, absorbing colour and sunshine, and conceiving great pictures, and dreaming splendid dreams, the mystery raged in England with unabated fury. The shrewdest heads in the land had examined it, and given it up as invincible. Neither doctors nor lawyers, scientists nor parsons, philosophers nor mathematicians—nor, of course, detectives—could make head or tail of it. The hands of the formulators of ingenious theories were paralyzed before it, and Mr. Warlock-Jones, the world-famed detective, cautiously shielding his reputation behind indifference, refused to give an opinion.

'If my services are called in, well and good,' said he; 'but I never act unless professionally. For the rest, I have not even troubled to think about the affair.'

Immediately after the verdict, the papers had opened their columns to the public, which needed but little invitation to take up its pen. Perhaps the journal that benefited most by the correspondence sent to it was the *Daily Gazette*, for, on the very morning following the inquest, it was able to print the following letter:

'THE SEA ABOVE THE SKY.

'*To the Editor of the "Daily Gazette."*

'SIR,

'As a plain person, who is accounted by his circle to be possessed of a fair share of intelligence and judgment, and who, moreover, has in his youth received the usual education given to the sons of substantial men, I beg you to find room in the columns of your esteemed journal for a few brief remarks that may not be inappropriate to the present occasion.

'From my earliest boyhood it has always been characteristic of me to think for myself, and I can well remember—even after the lapse of over thirty years—the shock of surprise I had when I was first told at school that the earth went round the sun, and not the sun round the earth. In my examination papers I was, of course, forced to repeat that absurd statement, as I may now venture to call it. But, in my own heart, I

believed that the sun was a great light put in the firmament by the Almighty for the benefit of man, and that it rose in the morning and set in the evening. This fact is so obvious to the senses, and so simple in its truth, that I fail to understand how civilized man could have allowed himself to be bullied out of it by the so-called scientists.

'What can man really know or find out about the universe? As Mr. Pope said in his celebrated and incomparable "Essay on Man":

'"Know then thyself, presume not God to scan;
The proper study of mankind is man.
Placed on this isthmus of a middle state,
A Being darkly wise, and rudely great:
* * * *
Born but to die, and reasoning but to err.
* * * *
Created half to rise and half to fall;
Great lord of all things, yet a prey to all;
Sole judge of Truth, in endless Error hurled:
The glory, jest, and riddle of the world!

Go, wondrous creature! mount where Science guides:
Go, measure earth, weigh air, and state the tides;
Instruct the planets in what orbs to run,
Correct old Time, and regulate the Sun. . . .
Go, teach Eternal Wisdom how to rule—
Then drop into thyself, and be a fool!"

'Sir, were Mr. Pope alive at the present day he could scarcely have penned a more seasonable and a more vigorous and scathing satire against the presumption and folly of the scientists; nor a passage more calculated to check their insidious

undermining of that simple faith of man in the Almighty which is man's heritage and privilege.

'I am grateful to have lived in an age when at least one indisputable event should have occurred —happening before our very eyes—that makes us challenge the truth of our accepted stock of knowledge (?) about the earthly habitation that has been allotted to man—an event, moreover, that curiously corroborates other events that have been recorded from time to time, all testifying to a truth of which it has thus pleased the Almighty to give us an occasional glimpse. Who shall say whether He hath not done this by way of warning us, in His greatness and mercy, against the impious trend of human thought!

'MAY NOT THE SEA FLOW ABOVE THE SKY?

'This once admitted, the whole mystery surrounding the death of the late lamented Mr. Robert Ashfield is explained away. Do not we human beings inhabit the sea-depths, and are we not now and again, by Divine permission, vouchsafed a glimpse of the fact? To quote a few instances: It is on record that on the 12th of September in the year of our Lord one thousand six hundred and eighty, that being a clear day, two fleets of great warships were seen high in the air sailing towards each other under full canvas, one coming from the northern quarter of the sky, and the other from the southern. This was in

the neighbourhood of Porsnet, in Monmouthshire. The first shot came from the leader of the van-guard of the fleet from the north, and then the engagement commenced in deadly earnest. Broadsides were exchanged. The whole country round about resounded with the noise of the explosions, and great flashes of fire lit up the sky, that had become dense with smoke, like sheet-lightning.

'Gervase of Tilbury has preserved for us the following two occurrences:

'"One Sunday," he says, "the people of a village in England were coming out of church on a thick, cloudy day, when they saw the anchor of a ship hooked on to one of the tombstones, the cable, which was tightly stretched, hanging down from the air. The people were astonished, and while they were consulting about it, suddenly they saw the rope move as though someone laboured to pull up the anchor. The anchor, however, was still held fast by the stone, and a great noise was suddenly heard in the air, like the shouting of sailors. Presently a sailor was seen sliding down the cable for the purpose of unfixing the anchor; and when he had just loosened it the villagers seized hold of him, and while in their hands he quickly died, just as though he had been drowned. About an hour after, the sailors above, hearing no more of their

comrade, cut the cable, and sailed away. In memory of this extraordinary event, the people of the village made the hinges of the church doors out of the iron of the anchor, and there they are still to be seen."

'"At another time a merchant of Bristol set sail with his cargo for Ireland. Some time after this, while his family were at supper, a knife suddenly fell in through the window on to the table. When the husband returned, he saw the knife, declared it to be his own, and said that on such a day, at such an hour, while sailing in an unknown part of the sea, he dropped the knife overboard, and the day and hour were known to be exactly the time when it fell through the window."

'Not to make too large a demand on your space, I content myself with citing the above, which I have selected as typical and to the point. I make bold to say that there is scarcely a county in the kingdom but has preserved records of phenomena of the same nature as the above. Fleets of ships have been observed sailing through the heavens again and again, and whales and monstrous fish and sea-serpents have become visible, apparently swimming in the air. Once a diver was seen fighting for his life with a shark, and succeeded in stabbing his enemy in the belly, and swimming away.

'Clearly, the recent case of Mr. Robert Ashfield is one of the same nature as the above. He is swept overboard in a stormy sea, and sinks to the bottom. In his downward course he strikes the roof of Mr. John Clinton's studio with violence, and finally comes to rest at the sea-bottom, which at that spot happens to correspond with the floor of the said studio. And my contention is that, by a much-needed and merciful Divine interposition, the occurrence has been made manifest to our senses.

'For I need hardly say that, of the universe about us, we can only know that which is revealed to us through the medium of our five senses in the normal exercise of their functions, and, by the power of the Almighty, that part of His universe which is so revealed unto human beings doth appear to be a full and complete universe. But if the range of our senses were increased, or if we were endowed with additional senses over and above those which it hath pleased the Almighty to bestow upon us, who can say what new marvels and wonders would become manifest to us? But there can be no question that such additional senses have been withheld from us, and that such increase of range of the senses we do already possess has been denied us, for reasons that become clear after a little reflection.

'How would it be possible for us to live at all

if we had cognizance of the universe wholly and completely as the Almighty hath made it? Might there not be things which no man might behold and live? Might there not be shapes and phantoms from which we should recoil in affright? Might not our souls be unable to cope with the multiplicity of all that would come swarming upon us? Might we not be overwhelmed by that which we are not fitted to bear? Our brains would be in bewilderment, and we should have a dim sense of an infinite chaos like one in a swoon. Those elements, too, of which we are not at present cognizant, and which are therefore innocuous to us, might become immediately fatal to human life. Mr. Robert Ashfield lay dead at the bottom of the ocean, because where we but perceive the air he encountered water, in which his life could not continue.

'How, then, shall we not recognise the munificence of the Creator in thus endowing man with those senses whereby he doth make such a selection from the wholeness of this wondrous universe as is in harmony with his nature and able to be borne by it? He thus becometh cognizant of that part which his soul is fitted to become cognizant of; to wit, so much of sound, so much of light, so much of heaven and of the things that be therein, so much of the earth and of the things that be on the earth.

'And if it be accorded that there may be moments when, by Divine intervention, the natural range of the senses of a human being is extended—moments during which he may catch a glimpse of one of those other worlds than ours that swarm commingled with ours, or of the shapes and phantoms that do inhabit therein; then may the many accounts of apparitions and visitations which are related by worthy and honourable men of sound understanding, and which are mocked at by the presumptuous, be justified and explained on a veritable basis of pure reason. I enclose my name and address, and remain,

'Yours, etc.,

'VERITAS.'

'The sea above the sky' was a theory that most people jumped at unhesitatingly, assimilating it so rapidly and thoroughly that it became at once an unshakable article of faith. Old records were investigated in every parish throughout the kingdom, and thousands of cases were brought to light that afforded the most striking evidence that mankind inhabited the floor of the ocean. Men who averred they had always held the opinion that the sea extended overhead, but had not hitherto dared to give expression to it for fear of ridicule, now came forward with corroborative family traditions and personal experiences. People trod cautiously in the dark as though fearful of stumbling over the dead men that the ocean had swallowed. The half-mad geniuses, who had starved all their lives on unprofitable inventions, dreamed of mighty schemes for recovering the sunk invisible treasures that were scattered on all hands.

Amid the great bulk of the people, all the slumbering forces of superstition had been roused to activity. The atheists, who attempted to give their usual addresses in the London parks or at the accustomed street-corners, were mobbed and beaten, their audiences going to reinforce some rival open-air service. Old women were ducked in horse-ponds on suspicion of being witches. Waverers returned to the fold of religion, so that the churches were besieged on Sundays.

A wave of morality ran through the social organism. There was a marked diminution in speculative transactions on the Exchanges. Buyers for big firms refused to take commissions, and the few honest merchants were astonished to find themselves thriving. The very solicitors took the incredible course of looking into their bill-books and anticipating the taxing-master.

And side by side with the purely religious revival there sprang into new life every form of

Spiritualism, every unedifying belief in the occult. Necromancy and divination, magic and astrology, paraded in the daylight. An epidemic of table-turning and ghost-raising left but few households unscourged. Reports of marvellous séances were greedily absorbed.

The Theosophist Society, too, had large accessions to its ranks. A considerable section of it, however, was won over to the 'Veritas' majority, declaring that the two creeds were not irreconcilable, and that a combination of both made a good working philosophy.

Another general sensation was caused by a correspondent who was allowed publicity to his views in the columns of the *Saturday Critic*. His was an alternative suggestion to that made by 'Veritas,' and would allow that the scientists were nearly right. There was wanted but a modification of their teachings to afford a perfectly rational explanation of the St. John's Wood mystery. If, instead of supposing the world to be a solid globe on the convex surface of which mankind lived, the sun, moon, and stars being set in outer space, we looked at it as a concave spherical surface, like the inner surface of a ball, the sun being fixed at the centre of the hollow sphere, and the moon and stars grouped round, all phenomena of the kind that were being discussed would bear quite a simple interpretation. Gravity must

be supposed to be an attraction evenly spread over and inherent in the whole concave surface, and to be capable of failing at moments. Anything falling from a ship would, on account of such a momentary failure, be attracted backwards towards the opposite part of the surface. The Ostend boat, being in the Channel, and comparatively near London, the subtending straight line to the arc along which it had been travelling would be a comparatively small one; and Mr. Ashfield's body, after sufficient immersion in the water to drown him, would, gravity failing, begin to rise again, and therefore to fall directly over London, where it would arrive very soon. Of course, this theory would take it for granted the dimensions attributed by the astronomers to the sun and the other heavenly bodies were enormously overstated, which he (the correspondent) had long since suspected to be the case.

In the meanwhile, the speculator who had rented Clinton's studio was making a rich harvest, charging sixpence per person for ordinary admission, a shilling on Wednesdays, and a half-crown on Wednesday nights.

CHAPTER IX.

'DEAREST,

'At last I have plucked up courage to run the gauntlet and start writing this under a fierce fire from Gerald, which he assures me is going to continue till I throw down my pen in disgust and tear up the sheet. But, having once begun, I am only the more determined to write you one of the longest letters — and therefore nicest, you will be saying—that I have yet sent you. And first, since Gerald will insist on worrying me, I'm going to write all about him. He is saying just now that I won't let you alone, and that you'll be getting awfully sick of me, and that if you don't get well again it'll be all my fault. If he had a girl writing so many letters to him, he wouldn't put up with it. If he ever falls in love, it'll be with a woman who can't read and write. Women expect you to write them love-letters, and he couldn't be bothered to make himself so absurd.

'I shall not report any more. Do you know that Gerald used not to be so bad two or three years ago? Every evening he sits by the fire, and, if he is not buried in his philosophy books, he pours forth such a torrent of bitterness that I should get quite uneasy about it if I didn't know he was only making fun. And even from his books he manages to dig up such brutal things about poor women, and I get the benefit of them, of course. Nothing seems to make him happier than to read out aloud to me from Darwin some spiteful passage about the characteristics of the female that specially tickles him. This evening he seemed quite good at first, and kissed me twice when he came home. But afterwards he took down a big thick book on Psychology—the very look of it as it stands in its place on the shelf always makes me shudder—and after he had been reading quietly for half an hour he burst into such a shout of laughter, and then with great glee he began reading to me something about women cultivating their peripheral visual attention more than men. I don't know what "peripheral visual attention" means, but I'm sure it's something uncomplimentary. Perhaps it's a learned way of saying that we women squint a good deal, which isn't true.

'Gerald really works too hard—I am so thankful *you* are not a doctor, dearest. Gerald begins

early, and is rarely finished till past nine o'clock. I think he ought to go out more than he does, but he argues that his conversational powers have been already sufficiently taxed during the day, and he must leave it to the amateurs to do for relaxation what he has to do professionally. He will insist that a doctor is a professional conversationalist, and that medical examinations should be restricted to testing a man's capabilities in that direction, and his power of adapting his point of view at a moment's notice.

'But I think Gerald is a darling hypocrite. When Willy Templeton and his wife were here the other day, Gerald rattled away like an old woman half the night, and his face fairly shone with pleasure the whole time. Then we went out to dinner on Monday to the Sandfords', in Chelsea. A serious-looking, middle-aged man with a long beard took me in, and we talked about Ruskin, and Lamb, and Rossetti. He seemed to be quite astonished when I got enthusiastic about Rossetti—he's the sort of man that somehow damps one's enthusiasm. His face was set the whole time in a frigid solemnity, and a gleam or smile never so much as lighted it up. I think I made a joke—that was at the beginning, when I was still rash. He said: "Really! is that so?" I had not the courage to explain it was only a joke, and you may be sure I did not dare attempt another.

'Then we talked about art as well. Poor Jack! You should have heard how he cut up all the things you are so enthusiastic about. He said he wouldn't have Puvis de Chavannes or Whistler at any price. And then he talked such a lot about "tactile values," and I only vaguely understood what he meant. How is it you never explained to me anything about "tactile values"? You must teach me all about them when you come home.

'Gerald sat nearly opposite us. He had such a sweet-looking girl next to him. She was all in white, and I am sure she could not have been more than seventeen. I am quite certain he didn't say a single thing to shock her, for she seemed to be amused the whole time. Gerald's face was perfectly angelic. I was watching them just to see how they would get on, and yet neither of them suspected it. It's curious how we women can keep on talking, just as if we were entirely engrossed in the conversation of our neighbour, and yet keep an eye on everybody else in the room.

'Jack dear, it just strikes me that this must be what Gerald meant by "peripheral visual attention." There, I've given myself away. It *is* true that women cultivate their "peripheral visual

attention" more than men! But wouldn't it be terrible if *all* the things Gerald says were true? Do you know, sometimes I suspect they may be. Whenever I get a chance of testing any of them, Gerald turns out to be right.

'I almost fancy I shall end by being a frightful pessimist one of these days!

'Any way, I think I had much rather listen to Gerald than to that solemn man, who really bored me a little at the end. I can imagine Gerald saying to me: "Perhaps you bored *him!*" Well, without vanity, I may safely say I didn't. He was by far too much bound up in his dissertations on tactile values and other things to take much notice of my remarks. The sound of his own voice was sufficient unto him, and he was wholly self-satisfied, and completely happy.

'Dearest, I miss you. I find so little in life when you are away. Perhaps I am more like Gerald than either of us imagines. You have helped me to see such beauty in everything that I only begin to suspect and fear the possibilities of my true self when you are not with me. I am afraid of ending by acquiring a taste for this bitter brilliancy of which Gerald is so lavish. You offer such a contrast to him, and I need the stimulus of your spirit and your enthusiasm.

'He wilfully suppresses in his talk any word that might show him to be possessed of emotions

and affections. He aspires to be a mere brilliant brain. In practice, of course, his heart has its way, and, dearest, you don't know half the good and noble things he does, though he pretends to value money so highly, and puts on an air of being a hard business man, and driving hard bargains. Of course, he does drive hard bargains —sometimes—but not for himself! His own life gives the lie to all his tirades about the vileness of human nature. When I tell him so, he replies that he is not a human being and that therefore my argument is pointless.

'It cannot be good for me to listen so much to these outpourings of his cynicism, which, I begin to suspect, he has, perhaps, persuaded himself to be his real mental standpoint. If so, he has wilfully adopted it with his brain, and it is, in reality, utterly opposed to his whole nature.

'In you, dearest, there is no such antagonism between your brain and heart. Your whole nature shows itself, as through glass, in your every word and look and action. And a sweet, pure nature it is! I am only twenty-three, yet I wonder sometimes if I should not have been already soured had I not met and loved you. Now that you are away from me, I am only just beginning to realize how much good you have done me, and what your love means to my life.

'It is wonderful to think how I have grown to

attention" more than men! But wouldn't it be terrible if *all* the things Gerald says were true? Do you know, sometimes I suspect they may be. Whenever I get a chance of testing any of them, Gerald turns out to be right.

'I almost fancy I shall end by being a frightful pessimist one of these days!

'Any way, I think I had much rather listen to Gerald than to that solemn man, who really bored me a little at the end. I can imagine Gerald saying to me: "Perhaps you bored *him!*" Well, without vanity, I may safely say I didn't. He was by far too much bound up in his dissertations on tactile values and other things to take much notice of my remarks. The sound of his own voice was sufficient unto him, and he was wholly self-satisfied, and completely happy.

'Dearest, I miss you. I find so little in life when you are away. Perhaps I am more like Gerald than either of us imagines. You have helped me to see such beauty in everything that I only begin to suspect and fear the possibilities of my true self when you are not with me. I am afraid of ending by acquiring a taste for this bitter brilliancy of which Gerald is so lavish. You offer such a contrast to him, and I need the stimulus of your spirit and your enthusiasm.

'He wilfully suppresses in his talk any word that might show him to be possessed of emotions

and affections. He aspires to be a mere brilliant brain. In practice, of course, his heart has its way, and, dearest, you don't know half the good and noble things he does, though he pretends to value money so highly, and puts on an air of being a hard business man, and driving hard bargains. Of course, he does drive hard bargains —sometimes—but not for himself! His own life gives the lie to all his tirades about the vileness of human nature. When I tell him so, he replies that he is not a human being and that therefore my argument is pointless.

'It cannot be good for me to listen so much to these outpourings of his cynicism, which, I begin to suspect, he has, perhaps, persuaded himself to be his real mental standpoint. If so, he has wilfully adopted it with his brain, and it is, in reality, utterly opposed to his whole nature.

'In you, dearest, there is no such antagonism between your brain and heart. Your whole nature shows itself, as through glass, in your every word and look and action. And a sweet, pure nature it is! I am only twenty-three, yet I wonder sometimes if I should not have been already soured had I not met and loved you. Now that you are away from me, I am only just beginning to realize how much good you have done me, and what your love means to my life.

'It is wonderful to think how I have grown to

open my heart to you without restraint, and how it makes me happy simply to write the three little words, "I love you." When I first met you, how far off you were from me! Even when I loved you there seemed a great and almost impassable barrier between us. Things that I longed to say to you struggled to my lips, but I dared not allow them to come out. They were about my inmost self—such things as I had never yet spoken to human being. And now it has come about, gradually, gradually, that I find them rise in a flood the moment I turn my thoughts to you. It makes me happy to lay bare my heart to you—I know that you will understand. Love me, love me always, dearest. I could not live else!

'There is little more to tell you. No doubt you will have read in the French papers how the excitement progresses here, but I send you a packet of the latest papers all the same. Mrs. Ashfield's house in the Finchley Road is shut up at present. Gerald says she has left town for a while, as she was annoyed by the crowds that gathered day after day outside Colombo Hall. He and Dr. Whiting had a letter from her, and they sent her a prescription by post. She is staying at Brighton, which is supposed to be a secret.

'And now I can't finish without telling you

something that Gerald wants to reserve till your return. He is asleep at last on his armchair, quite worn out by my quiet persistence in going on with this letter. He has sold for you every scrap of canvas you left behind! Possibly you will think he has been over-zealous on your behalf, as there must have been odd things you would have preferred to suppress. But you must not grumble. You gave him full power to deal with applicants, and you must abide by the result —which, after all, is not so very unpleasant. He won't tell me how much money he has for you, but the look in his face when I try to coax him into telling me is reassuring. It is getting late, and I have written five whole sheets. Good-bye, dearest, for the present.

'Your own

'ETHELYN.'

So read one of the letters from Ethelyn to Clinton, sent early in the new year, when the artist was about half through his holiday.

Early in February, and two days before his return to London, he received the following, the last of the long series that passed between them:

'YOU JACK,

'You can scarcely imagine what a change has come over me the last day or two. I seem to be treading on air, somehow, and I even catch

myself humming gaily in the street. My pianoforte execution astonishes me — I find myself putting such brilliancy and dash into it, and at other moments such softness and sweetness as I had never imagined myself to be capable of. I seem suddenly to feel the spirit of Music so much better. My fingers no longer move under the mechanical control of a critical brain, but all that is ME seems to be in them.

'Is not Music the echo of the beauty that is in ourselves?

'Dearest, I know I shall not spoil you by telling you all this, for, of course, you will know at once it is the prospect of having you with me again that elates me. And, then, it is nice to be able to feel glad at your coming without being selfish, since you are now quite well and strong again.

'I have looked at two or three studios for you. There is a nice one near the Heath for a hundred a year that I think would suit you. It has a hall, and there are three rooms attached. The studio itself is, perhaps, a trifle smaller than your last, but it is very cosy, and I am already longing to be helping you make it look pretty. There is no reason why it should ever get into so frightful a state of disorder as the last. That was really hopeless. I am almost glad the blood-curdling mystery came to drive you out of the damp, ram-

shackle barn. Of course, you are to be Gerald's guest till you get settled.

'Thank you, dearest, for your last sweet letter. It makes me so happy to know you are full of hope again, and ready to face the future. If you want me again, I'm sure I could find time to sit for one of the figures in your Academy picture this year. Yes, I like the idea very much indeed. Three beautiful women in a garden in their fresh spring toilettes, one plucking a flower, the other two holding half-completed bouquets, the whole sounding a note of joyousness and hope! It will just express your mood—and mine!

'Need I answer the other question—whether, if the next six months bring you encouragement, I am ready to throw in my lot with yours? You have but to call me when you will, and I will come. When you see the studio I have selected —and I have the refusal of it till you are here— I am sure you will fall in love with it almost as much as you are with me. How splendid it would be for us to live there! It would be almost like picnicking. But we shall have a long talk all about these things when you are back.

'There is not very much to tell you about ourselves. Gerald has been rather well-behaved of late. He has, however, been called out several times very late in the evening, and I am afraid

he will kill himself. We had your cousins—the Warburtons—to lunch here yesterday: Charley and two of the girls. Charley affects to be a rake, and puts on a fearful swagger. His sisters, however, are charming as always.

'Mrs. Ashfield is back, and has taken an old-fashioned furnished house that overlooks the Heath. There are many literary celebrities, Gerald tells me, living in the immediate neighbourhood. Her own house in Finchley Road is up to let. It appears that, though she is still wealthy, Mrs. Ashfield only inherited a third of her husband's fortune, and she does not care to go on living by herself in so great a house as Colombo Hall. It appears most of Mr. Ashfield's money was invested in his business and in real estate in Ceylon, and his two sons have come in for all that part of his fortune, in order that the business should not be disintegrated. She has, however, a small life interest in the tea plantations. The eldest son is now on his way to England.

'All this I have learnt from Mrs. Ashfield herself. I called on her on Tuesday for the first time. Her aunt, Mrs. Norton, who is still with her, was out shopping. I had never seen her before, but I certainly think the portraits of her in the papers were shockingly bad. She has no pretensions to beauty in the conventional sense,

but she has a face of her own. She is really charming and gentle, and ever so bright, and I think her voice is exquisite. She tells me she is twenty-nine, but there are moments when you feel you are talking just to a sweet little girl. She doesn't reach much above my shoulder, but, then, I am very tall for a woman. I am so sorry for the great trouble she has gone through. We have become great friends already, and she is coming to see me to-day.

'She told me in confidence that Mr. Warlock-Jones, the great detective, in spite of his statements to the interviewers, is investigating the case. He attended the inquest from beginning to end—disguised, of course! He is very determined about it, as he knows this will be one of the greatest feathers in his cap, and he makes it a point of pride to succeed. Of course, he ridicules the sea-above-the-sky explanation. He came and offered his services to Mrs. Ashfield gratis, as he is rich beyond the dreams of avarice, and can afford to work for glory. Of course, it is very important that the fact that he is at work on the case should not get known.

'For the rest, the newspapers are beginning to leave out references to the mystery, and the great excitement has quieted down.

'Mind you are well wrapped up for the journey,

and be careful not to miss any of your meals. Send a telegram as soon as you arrive at Dover, and everything shall be ready for you. I will count the hours, dearest, till you are here.

'Your dearest friend,

'ETHELYN.'

CHAPTER X.

BEFORE the end of February, Clinton was comfortably installed in the new studio, and at work on his Academy picture. Ethelyn was to stand for one of the upright figures, as the posture of the stooping girl was too difficult for any but a professional model. He had started on the first rough sketch with something of the fire and enthusiasm of his student days; and as he had been able to get a satisfactory model, his first progress was smooth and rapid. Even during the remainder of the February the weather was clear and fine, and March opened propitiously, so that the light was good, and Clinton could make the most of the short days.

As he was within such easy reach of the Heath, he got into the habit of taking a half-hour's sharp promenade thereon, regularly at mid-day; and, striding along the Parliament Hill Road one day, he was astonished to find he had overtaken two ladies who appeared to know him. It did not

take him a moment to recall Mrs. Ashfield, and the now 'inevitable aunt,' as Mrs. Norton had been recently christened by Ethelyn, and he was able to recover himself in time to acknowledge their bows without hesitation.

He had not seen Mrs. Ashfield since the last day of the inquest, though Ethelyn's acquaintance with her had increased, and one or two further visits had been interchanged by the two women since his return. As he observed that Mrs. Ashfield had the air of being about to make a remark, he adapted his pace to theirs.

'I am so glad to see you again, Mr. Clinton,' she began, in that clear, soft voice whose pleasant quality had first sounded in his ear again when Ethelyn had stirred his memory by her reference to it in her letter.

Her gray eyes showed candid and clear under their long lashes. Her whole face, too, seemed to suggest the same winning gentleness with which she spoke. It was strangely school-girlish in its expression, but there was that fine light in it, too, which told of brain-power lying behind. Altogether as dainty a little body, he told himself, as his own Ethelyn was stately and splendid!

'I have been wondering for quite some little time past,' she went on, 'if I might be daring enough to ask Ethelyn to take me to your new studio. She has been so interested in it that she

has quite interested me in it, and I have been longing to have a peep at it.'

Mrs. Norton seemed discreetly to linger half a pace in the rear, as if it were natural she should take no part in the conversation.

Clinton murmured a polite reply to the effect that a visit from Mrs. Ashfield would have given him great pleasure, and that he was sorry she had not mentioned it to Ethelyn, who, he was quite sure, would have been charmed to bring her. At the same time, he had a consciousness of the banality of his remark, and a feeling that he did not wish her to get the impression of his being a merely commonplace person—both, perhaps, caused by a recognition of a certain piquancy beneath her softness, and an instinctive measurement of himself against her.

'You artists are such romantic beings to us poor average people, and it is quite a thrilling experience for us to be allowed to intrude into your workshops. But I know how short the days are now, and how precious the hours of light, and so I did not care to think of interrupting your work.'

Clinton was pleased, because people, as a rule, did not manifest such consideration. He hastened to press the invitation on her.

'I fear, however,' he continued laughingly, 'that you will not get your thrill. The place is

more like a drawing-room than a workshop. Thanks to Ethelyn, the cherished traditions of dirt and disorder have been dethroned. And, then, I haven't very much to show you—only some half-finished sketches I amused myself making in Provence this year. And I hope Mrs. Norton will be able to come, too,' he added, suddenly remembering her presence, which the discreet half-pace to the rear had for the moment annihilated.

Mrs. Norton smiled her thanks simultaneously with Mrs. Ashfield's expression of hers, and the time and day having been arranged, Clinton bade them good-day, and hurried back to his work.

From Ethelyn, who was pleased he had asked them, he learnt that a similar desire had also been hovering in her mind; but she had decided to postpone the expression of it till he had made considerable headway with his picture.

He gave them tea on the Wednesday, though Ethelyn was not of the party, as she had visitors of her own that afternoon. Mrs. Ashfield pleasantly took possession of the studio, both making and pouring the tea, and Clinton was sympathetically glad to see her in such good spirits, for the memory of the crushed woman who had tried so bravely to bear up at the inquest rose now in contrast. Mrs. Norton, he observed, laughed at the right moments, smiled the rest of

the time, was uniformly approbative, but said nothing notable. So far he could detect in her nothing to justify her blood relationship to Mrs. Ashfield.

In Mrs. Ashfield herself he was certainly beginning to be interested, and admitted to himself he would like to know her a great deal better. A word or a phrase of hers here or there struck an arrestive note amid the superficial chatter natural to a studio tea-party, giving him a glimpse of a personality he felt to possess both charm and originality, and provoking his desire to see deeper into it. Her face, too, to-day, had a more marked quality of piquancy, and it now struck him as better than that dormant copy of it—half conception, half remembrance—he had carried in his mind. In the street one would have passed it without a second glance or thought. But a face of that class—that is, of the class that belonged to no class—was only to be seen at its best under fitting circumstances; and, when he had seen it before, it had been clouded by grief and prostration. As he saw it now, with its quick vitality, he began to feel and understand its peculiar beauty; one had to look at it for itself and by itself, putting out of mind all one's existing notions of what a woman's beauty should be. To try and make it fit to any standard was to blind one's self to its claims, since it was a

standard unto itself. But its spirit once caught, it burnt itself on to the vision, compelling obeisance, and entirely beyond range of conventional rivalry.

He drank more tea than was his habit for the pleasure of watching her easy assumption of proprietorship, as with laughing anxiousness she made the kettle boil again and brewed a second supply.

'I almost feel as if I were usurping Ethelyn's place,' she said suddenly. 'I should so much have liked her to be here. She is so sweet, that one really can't see enough of her. What a pity she has those tiresome people this afternoon! Don't look so horrified, Mr. Clinton. Ethelyn told me herself they were tiresome.'

'Did I look horrified?' he asked. 'I assure you, Mrs. Ashfield, I was doing my best to look sympathetic—on Ethelyn's account, of course.'

'Of course you looked sympathetic. But I just saw you were going to look—something, and I jumped at the wrong conclusion. Then it was too late to stop myself. It was a sheer misfortune. Please look sympathetic again—for me this time!'

Clinton tried, but could only succeed in pulling distorted faces, and finally breaking into laughter.

'I was expecting a wan, sad, gallant smile in acknowledgment of my request,' said Mrs. Ashfield; 'but you are so much in love that you cannot spare even that for another. I really

think Byron must have libelled men when he wrote:

> '"Man's love is of man's life a thing apart,
> 'Tis woman's whole existence."

'He certainly stole it from the French,' said Clinton, 'which makes him a double criminal.'

'Ah, but he was a great poet,' said Mrs. Ashfield enthusiastically, her eyes flashing with a new and strange light. 'He has been neglected, but he will yet again occupy his rightful position.'

Clinton was startled at her sudden fire.

'No, no,' she went on, almost to herself; 'I do not like the coupling of that stupid word "criminal" with a name like his. A genius can do no wrong; he is not to be bound by the same laws as the vulgar herd. He gives the world so much, that surely it must not bind him as it binds those who give it nothing.'

'Yes, much should be forgiven to genius,' murmured Clinton, catching her mood, whilst all the homage in him for the giants who were his gods surged up in almost overpowering emotion.

There was a silence.

'I think some of Byron's things are really wonderful,' put in Mrs. Norton. '"The Prisoner of Chillon" is beautiful—it always makes me cry. I don't quite know, though, which I prefer—that, or Scott's "Lady of the Lake."'

Clinton almost shivered. He felt that Mrs.

Norton's remark was quite outside the conversation, and he knew, as he caught Mrs. Ashfield's glance, that the same thought had occurred to her. There was something apologetic in the glance—something that craved his sympathetic indulgence.

'Much, too, should be forgiven to people who are quite the reverse of geniuses,' observed Mrs. Ashfield, in tone and manner so as to bring back the note of lightness that had been displaced.

Clinton laughed, tickled by the daring way in which she had given expression to their common thought; and, to his amusement, Mrs. Norton joined in the laugh.

'I am quite willing to forgive all such people, save those who won't realize they are such, and who will persist in trying to foist their illusion on the world,' he declared. 'But even then I'm not sure whether it's not their misfortune rather than their fault.'

'It's certainly a misfortune for the world. Not that, as a rule, I particularly sympathize with the world. I am wicked enough to be glad the world has some misfortunes.'

She managed to put a half-playful intonation into the words that robbed them of any underlying bitterness, and made them appear like the mere wilful quip of a quick-tongued woman. He answered her in the same spirit.

'And *your* wickedness—must that be overlooked as well?'

'I am by far too modest to answer that question,' she replied, smiling again; whilst Mrs. Norton, making the correct inference, laughed heartily. 'I must leave you to decide on the point.'

She rose, preliminary to going; and Clinton rose, too.

'I'm afraid, Mr. Clinton,' resumed Mrs. Ashfield, 'you must think my manner quite at variance with the colour I am wearing. But it is long since I have passed so pleasant an hour. It has taken me out of myself. Besides, I am glad to have for once belied this senseless black that the world prescribes, and that I keep on wearing—by force of habit, I suppose. Why should people who have lost a near one be compelled to wear their hearts on their sleeves—and on their bodies?' she added. 'It is a primitive notion, worthy only of savages—this externalization of one's inner feelings—that most often degenerates into a lying black husk. But the very thought depresses me—let me look again at the picture you have begun. Already it breathes the spirit of freshness and hope—it will do me good.'

He turned the canvas towards her again, silently appreciative of her emotion. Hers, like his own, was a high-strung spirit, he told himself,

but without that vent of artistic creation which he possessed. Such a spirit must have in it the potentiality of endless suffering, understood not of the crowd. Ethelyn and himself might, indeed, be a help to her!

'I see you have just roughly indicated how the other two figures are to come,' observed Mrs. Ashfield, as she examined the picture. 'Which of them is to be Ethelyn—she told me, you know, she was going to sit, or is it "stand" I should say? And what flowers is she going to hold?'

He explained his ideas as well as he could in the present stage of the painting. Then, as she still stood before it, he had a thought that made his heart throb—a thought that seemed subtly to hover in the air, and to have floated to him.

Perhaps she might give him his third figure!

He fancied for a moment he read the very wish in her now pensive face; but he dared not formulate the suggestion. No word was said by either.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Norton was putting on her gloves. Mrs. Ashfield suddenly turned to her.

'Really, auntie,' she said gaily, 'we mustn't leave all this disorder behind us. You and I are going to wash up the cups and put things straight.'

And Mrs. Ashfield insisted on being as good as her word.

CHAPTER XI.

It was beginning to get dark when Mrs. Ashfield and Mrs. Norton at length took their departure, leaving Clinton in a strange, listless mood. He paced the studio a score of times, then drew a chair to the fire and sat there in a bewildered sort of a way, thinking of nothing definite, but somehow feeling nervous and vaguely tired. Nearly two hours went by, and when he bestirred himself at last he was almost astonished to find the studio wrapped in darkness.

He was up early the next morning, and had started work by eight o'clock. But at the end of ten minutes' manipulation of his spring picture he threw down palette and brush, and, after a little hesitation, took a small canvas and began sketching Mrs. Ashfield's face from memory. A few rapid strokes sufficed to give a rough suggestion of her, after which he worked on more carefully till the model's ring at the bell warned him it was nine o'clock.

He felt relieved, however, and could now proceed with the large painting. He had been forced by his temperament to commit the spirit of Mrs. Ashfield's face to canvas, as he had to do in the case of everything that impressed itself deeply on him.

His model, Madeline, a brisk, bright-eyed girl of eighteen, who looked charming in her spring costume, chattered away as usual, but he scarcely heeded her, for his mind was busy speculating about Mrs. Ashfield's life. Of her late husband nothing was known to him, but the man's character would have interested him now. He wanted to know what kind of mind it was had been mated to hers, and how the two minds had worked together; he wanted to know, too, a thousand details about herself, her life, her ideas, habits, tastes, and occupations. The model stopped her rattling tongue at last, and, vexed at his indifference to her talk to-day, sat in sulky silence. It was a point of pride with her to keep him amused whilst he worked, and she could not understand his ignoring her so absolutely unless she were boring him.

And, in truth, he did not make much progress with her figure, a fact which she was very keen to perceive, and which set her speculating as to what could be the matter with him. Perhaps he had quarrelled with his sweetheart! Ah, that

must be it, and it was not her tongue, after all, that had disconcerted him. She brightened up again with the assurance that accompanies restored self-respect, for she was wont to have her tongue highly prized. All the same, she was sorry for him. If his sweetheart would only come and make it up with him! Madeline had posed for him a good deal in the past, and it always gave her such pleasure to see Miss Ethelyn, she was so beautiful and gracious. No, no, it could not be that they had quarrelled—Miss Ethelyn, so stately and sweet, and Mr. Clinton, so gentle and kind. Perhaps, after all, it *was* her unhappy tongue!

He took notice of her at last, awaking to the fact that she had kept silent for some time, and that the sparkle had gone from her face. He understood at once that she must have observed his abstraction, and, knowing her well, he hastened to make amends for his neglect to appreciate her volleys of smart things.

Elias, arriving just then, gave him the opportunity of atonement, for Madeline loved to exercise her wit at the expense of the old man in his Salvation Army uniform. He, in his turn, pottered about the place, stolidly contemptuous of her prattle and impervious to the sting of her shafts. So long as he came during the morning, he was allowed considerable latitude in his times

of attendance, as Clinton did not want to interfere with any other jobs the poor fellow might have a chance of picking up.

In the lunch interval, Clinton again took up the little sketch of Mrs. Ashfield and started working on it. Interrupted by a ring at the bell, he hastily placed the canvas on the ground, with its face to the wall, before opening the door. It was the postman, bringing an unexpected letter, and, as he looked at the unfamiliar, feminine handwriting on the envelope, his mind longingly associated it with Mrs. Ashfield.

And from Mrs. Ashfield it proved to be!

'DEAR MR. CLINTON (it ran),

'The mystery has furnished me with a pretext for writing to you, and therefore subjecting you to that inevitable surprise which one has to mention at the beginning when writing a letter to another who cannot be expecting it. However, I hope you will be gallant enough to let a little pleasure be mingled with your astonishment. Yours is one of those rare natures that can be gallant without being insincere. But this is merely an incidental compliment I feel compelled to pay you, and I must now come to the real point.

'You are not supposed to know, of course, that Mr. Warlock-Jones is investigating the mystery

for me, and as he thinks a conversation with you might be of assistance to him, he has not only authorized me to tell you the fact, but begs you to let him know through me what evening and at what time you could receive him. I forbade him to intrude on you without making an appointment. He has strange habits, you know. He might, for instance, pop up suddenly through the middle of the floor, and I did not want him to frighten you in that ridiculous way.

'It strikes me this Mr. Warlock-Jones is a bit of a humbug. By this I do not mean to call into question his ability in his own profession. But he is a terrible *poseur*, and, as it seems to me, is more intent on impressing you with his supernatural powers than on probing the mystery. It appears he has a theory, but he looks very solemn about it, and I can't induce him to talk it over with me, not even by making love to him!

'He is very sly. As you are also not supposed to know, he was at the inquest the whole time. But I am far from believing everything he says. He makes deliberate statements in order to make you admire him, and I should not be surprised if he pretends he was hidden under your bed on that terrible night. He asks you questions, and says, "Ah! that's just what I expected," when

you know very well he had been expecting just the opposite answer.

'In fact, as you will have gathered from all this, I begin to see through him, and to think that half the wonderful things he has done are all moonshine, and that the other half weren't wonderful. For Heaven's sake, don't let him get scent of this letter. If you merely keep it in your pocket he may read all these libels on him right through your clothes, and then I shall get into trouble with him.

'You mustn't think I make light of the mystery. But I am possessed of a sense of humour which will insist on fulfilling its functions, even when I am under the heaviest oppression. For instance, immediately after the inquest, and at a time when I was quite crushed as yet, some fussy members of the Psychical Society came to interview me in the interests of science. In spite of my telling them that I hadn't yet gone to sleep at one o'clock on that Wednesday night, they would insist I must at that time have been dreaming that my husband was being drowned. And when at last they saw it was no use trying to persuade me I had dreamed, one of them remarked, with such an air of disappointment, "What a pity you didn't dream!" and the others echoed, "What a pity!"

'Then another suggested that I might have

seen the figure of my husband standing by my bedside for a moment! I felt almost as if I were before the Inquisition, and that it was a wonder they hadn't brought a rack with them, or, perhaps, a thumbscrew, which would have been more convenient to carry through the streets.

'You will have been wondering how I know that you know all about Warlock-Jones! The fact is Ethelyn—the dear girl!—was tormented because she had written to you what I had told her in strict confidence, and her conscience could not rest till I had given her absolution! I forget whether I promised not to mention this. I do hope I made no such promise.

'Do please write me a line to fix that appointment. Strange that this letter should be all "mystery," when yesterday I don't think we referred to it! And now I think I ought to stop. Indeed, my only apology for writing you so long a letter is that it has given me pleasure—me, to whom time is mostly a long, dreary blank. I have an intuition that it will not have given you as much pleasure to have had to wade through it—but, per contra, I have a favourite theory that woman's intuitions, celebrated as they are from all time for their shrewdness and insight, are nevertheless a fraud. The quick leap of the feminine mind is as often as not to a wrong conclusion. For obvious reasons I am hoping this theory of

mine is a true one. I feel that we became friends yesterday, though we did not say so.

'Yours, in all sincerity,

'NELLIE ASHFIELD.

'P.S.—May I come again soon and see how the picture progresses? Of course, Ethelyn must preside over the tea-table this time.'

Though Clinton would not pretend to say whether Mrs. Ashfield's theory about woman's intuition in general was wrong or right, he was certain her letter did give him pleasure; so much so that he read it through again, and was interrupted in his after-meditations by the return of the model.

Madeline found him far more agreeable than in the morning, and was further enchanted when Ethelyn ran in for a few minutes' chat, and stayed to make the tea.

When the model had gone, he lighted the lamp and sat down to answer Mrs. Ashfield. He assured her he had been pleased to get her letter, and that he would be happy to receive Mr. Warlock-Jones, and give him such information as it lay in his power to do. He ended by naming a definite time when the detective might call. A single side of paper sufficed to exhaust the essential points that called for reply.

He looked over what he had written, and it

struck him as curt and formal. So unsympathetic a response to her long letter seemed unkind, and even impolite. Her last sentence rang in his ears: 'I feel that we became friends yesterday, though we did not say so.'

He tore up the sheet and began again, this time giving freer rein to his mood, and, though he did not write at so great a length as she had written, the spirit of his letter sufficiently indicated he had assented to the friendship that seemed to arise so naturally out of the situation.

Curious, it seemed to him as he reflected that evening, that such a friendship should have so gruesome an origin! And the mysterious circumstances attendant on the death of Robert Ashfield recurred to him again, for they had been almost totally crowded out of his mind by the immediate work before him. His interest in the whole matter was reawakened by this unforeseen intimacy with Mrs. Ashfield, and though he could not yet look back to that terrible night without depression, his brain continued to play round the facts of the case as they were known to him. He wondered whether Mr. Warlock-Jones would be forced to declare himself beaten, and by what means he could hope to better the exhaustive investigation made at the inquest.

Any way, he looked forward to see what the great detective would make of it. The man's

fame was so widespread that the mere prospect of talking to him and getting a glimpse of him at work was inviting; and this, though he did not question Mrs. Ashfield's opinion that Mr. Warlock-Jones was a *poseur*, or even that he was not such a wonder-worker as he was generally reputed to be.

About ten o'clock Clinton was debating whether to go round to have an hour's smoke with Gerald, when the doctor himself looked in on him.

'I was called out to see a patient round the corner, and thought you might give me your company home,' explained Gerald. 'By Jove! you're awfully comfortable here. It's to be hoped the dead are not going to get into the habit of dropping through your roof, else you'll find it rather a nuisance.'

Clinton glanced uneasily at the small canvas that stood against the wall. He was apprehensive lest by any chance he had placed it with its front outwards. Then he hastened to extinguish the lamp, lest Gerald, as was not unnatural for such a rare visitor to the studio, should take it into his head to look at the various canvases that stood about, and so stumble upon Mrs. Ashfield's portrait. He did not know himself why he felt so guilty about it, and he was startled to realize for the first time that there was something he wanted to conceal from Gerald.

'So this Warlock-Jones is on the war-path,' resumed Gerald, as they walked the short distance to his house. 'He came to interview Whiting. It seems he wanted a report on Robert Ashfield's physical and mental condition, and as I attended him the last two years of his life, Whiting referred him to me. In what queer ways the man goes to work!'

'I don't think I shall speculate any more about it,' said Clinton. 'I am simply going to wait and see.'

CHAPTER XII.

MR. WARLOCK-JONES made no attempt to pop up through the studio floor, but pulled the bell like any other mortal.

'I know you very well by sight, Mr. Clinton,' said the great detective genially, 'and I am very pleased indeed to have this opportunity of making your acquaintance. What a great improvement this studio is upon your last!'

He looked round approvingly, and fell comfortably into the armchair Clinton placed for him near the fire.

'Did you pay sixpence, a shilling, or half a crown to see my old place?' queried Clinton.

'I am not in the habit of making useless outlays,' returned Warlock-Jones, 'and so I took good care to pay my visit before the place passed into the hands of the showman. In fact, I was there the very next morning after this—well, curious corpse made its inconsiderate descent upon you.'

Clinton found the detective charming, and Warlock-Jones the artist's cigars excellent. For awhile they chatted pleasantly.

'Would it be indiscreet to ask how you're getting along?' asked Clinton at length.

'By no means,' said Warlock-Jones genially. 'To be quite frank about it, I think I'm beginning to see daylight; but it's a tough job. There are one or two vital points in the theory I've formed that are still wanting, and that's just the trouble. I can't fill up the blanks. It's a devilish case.'

'So most people said.'

'Oh, I don't mean it in that sense,' returned the detective, smiling. 'It was just my mild way of cursing. But I know I am on the right track. I've never known my instinct to mislead me, and so I trust it absolutely.'

'I presume you consider I can be of assistance to you?'

'Obviously. Else I should scarcely have the good fortune to be here now.'

'You are most kind,' said Clinton, inclining his head in acknowledgment.

'You will understand that I cannot at this stage mention anything of the conclusions at which I have arrived,' said Warlock-Jones. 'I merely wished to have a chat with you about your man.'

'About Elias?' ejaculated Clinton.

The detective smiled quietly and mysteriously.

'Well, I certainly shouldn't be inclined to think any harm of him,' observed Clinton. 'He's been about the place ever since I settled in Acacia Road. I fear I've been rather in the habit of upsetting his nice orderly arrangements, but, then, he has frequently avenged himself by inflicting on me nice little religious disquisitions—which were amusing enough at first, but have by this time become rather a bore.'

'I suppose that is when he poses? In which case you would not have been bored for some time. You see, I am not unacquainted with your doings.'

'I should expect you to know what I was thinking of when I went to sleep last night,' said Clinton, half in jest, half in sarcasm.

'I don't mind being chaffed,' said Warlock-Jones good-naturedly. 'But what I particularly wanted to know was whether you had noticed this Elias of late—is there anything in his manner that has attracted your attention?'

'Well, he has struck me as cheerful and happy—perfectly content with life. And now I come to think about it, he has looked rather well-fed of late.'

'In fact, as if he has been having rather more money to spend than before?' suggested Warlock-Jones.

Clinton assented, but had no idea where this extra money might have come from.

'I'll tell you,' said the detective. 'He has been regularly employed in the afternoons by Mr. Cyrus Ashfield, who, I may mention to you, intends leaving his present unpretentious premises and launching out on a larger scale. He has taken big prominent premises in an important thoroughfare. After grubbing along in a small way for twenty years, he suddenly develops energy—as great, let us say, as that of his late twin-brother!'

'But did not his brother leave him a good bit of money?' asked Clinton, who remembered now the fact that Elias worked for this other Mr. Ashfield. It had mildly surprised him when he had first learnt it at the inquest, but he had thought no more about it since. He wondered, however, what it all had to do with the mystery, and was only the more puzzled when Warlock-Jones seemed to lay stress on the fact that Elias had often been on the roof to clean the top-light, and must therefore have understood its mechanism.

'I had the honour of calling on Dr. Gerald Manly last night,' said the detective, before going. 'And I made the acquaintance of his charming sister, too. What delightful people they are!'

Even at the last moment Mr. Warlock-Jones stayed to bestow on Clinton more honeyed words, and went off leaving the artist quite mystified as to the real purpose of his visit.

In writing about this interview to Mrs. Ashfield, Clinton told her that the detective had made on him a very different impression from what he had been led by her to expect.

'He didn't seem to have anything of the conjurer about him; indeed, when I once ventured to indulge in a little sarcasm, he didn't seem to mind at all. We had rather a long talk, but a good deal of it had apparently little or nothing to do with the matter about which he had called, and I'm quite sure I could have told nothing new to him. The only result of his visit has been to set me racking my brains about one or two mysterious hints he dropped. He seems to be suspicious about my man Elias and your brother-in-law. From me he certainly got nothing that could have been of the least assistance to him.'

'Your letter makes me form two theories,' answered Mrs. Ashfield. 'I've seen such a deal of Mr. Warlock-Jones of late that I've quite caught his habit of forming theories. First, he will talk to you apparently about nothing for a whole hour in order to get at just one point, which, of course, you haven't noticed you've

given him. He does this, not because he could not just as well ask his question direct and at once, but because he can't help himself. Detectives, like other men, become the slaves of routine, I suppose. Don't you think it is wonderfully clever of me to see this? I am admiring myself immensely for it.

'My second theory—and your letter has just made it dawn upon me—is that he may have been making love to me all this time! Perhaps he thinks that the way to woo a woman is to show off his wonderful capabilities. No doubt he deems our sex impressionable, and, accordingly, he has been doing his best to impress me. If I had only realized this before, I should certainly not have made love to him as I did sometimes when I wanted to coax him into telling me things. And I didn't even succeed!

'I know he called on the Manlys, and I am looking forward to hearing dear Ethelyn's impression of the man very soon now. When is she beginning to stand for your picture, by the way?

'To tell you the truth, dear friend, I think it is high time Mr. Warlock-Jones finished, and declared himself beaten. He has now been engaged on the affair two months, and, though he makes vast pretences and drops mysterious hints —as he did to you—and is constantly having

interviews and pretending to be busy about it, it appears to me he is simply playing about. His interview with you was probably only by way of pretence that his investigation was in full swing. Don't you think I ought to tell him as much? Things have dragged on quite long enough, and I want to forget now.

'To forget! Somehow, one never forgets. And memories are as real in the anguish they bring as reality itself!

'But I have got again into one of my trains of thought. It is really too inconsiderate of me to inflict it on you, so I will say good-bye till Thursday afternoon next, but I hope to see your Ethelyn again before then. It was so sweet of her to fix an afternoon when she could meet me at the studio, and so good of you not to forget to ask her to do so.

'Your friend,

'NELLIE ASHFIELD.

'P.S.—If, in the meanwhile, you have ten minutes unoccupied, and the idea is not too distasteful, you may perhaps write me just a little note. You know how grateful I shall be for it.'

The next days went by uneventfully. The portraiture of pretty Madeline began to live on the canvas, and Ethelyn, who came in at least for a few minutes every day to see how matters

progressed, was getting impatient for her turn; so much so that Clinton let her stand a few times and sketched her in—at any rate, to a recognisable extent. Of Warlock-Jones he heard nothing more. Elias came in during the mornings as usual, and, though Clinton once or twice mentioned Mr. Cyrus Ashfield casually, the conversation did not seem to lead to any prospect of revelation. Moreover, he did not really care to talk very much to the man about his (Elias's) private business, and, as he had but got more and more impressed with Elias's absolute harmlessness, he ceased to trouble about the mysterious references of Mr. Warlock-Jones.

He had, of course, written again in reply to Mrs. Ashfield. Why should he not, he asked himself, since it was so small a thing to do, and it gave her pleasure? He had worked, too, on the small canvas at every spare moment, carefully placing it out of sight in the intervals. He had by no means put out of his head the idea that had come to him when Mrs. Ashfield, on her visit to the studio, had stood before his spring picture. On the contrary, the wish that she might give him his third figure had so taken possession of his mind that he had never been able to give another thought to the question of any other model posing for it. He knew very well, though, that he would have to decide very soon now on

interviews and pretending to be busy about it, it appears to me he is simply playing about. His interview with you was probably only by way of pretence that his investigation was in full swing. Don't you think I ought to tell him as much? Things have dragged on quite long enough, and I want to forget now.

'To forget! Somehow, one never forgets. And memories are as real in the anguish they bring as reality itself!

'But I have got again into one of my trains of thought. It is really too inconsiderate of me to inflict it on you, so I will say good-bye till Thursday afternoon next, but I hope to see your Ethelyn again before then. It was so sweet of her to fix an afternoon when she could meet me at the studio, and so good of you not to forget to ask her to do so.

'Your friend,

'NELLIE ASHFIELD.

'P.S.—If, in the meanwhile, you have ten minutes unoccupied, and the idea is not too distasteful, you may perhaps write me just a little note. You know how grateful I shall be for it.'

The next days went by uneventfully. The portraiture of pretty Madeline began to live on the canvas, and Ethelyn, who came in at least for a few minutes every day to see how matters

progressed, was getting impatient for her turn; so much so that Clinton let her stand a few times and sketched her in—at any rate, to a recognisable extent. Of Warlock-Jones he heard nothing more. Elias came in during the mornings as usual, and, though Clinton once or twice mentioned Mr. Cyrus Ashfield casually, the conversation did not seem to lead to any prospect of revelation. Moreover, he did not really care to talk very much to the man about his (Elias's) private business, and, as he had but got more and more impressed with Elias's absolute harmlessness, he ceased to trouble about the mysterious references of Mr. Warlock-Jones.

He had, of course, written again in reply to Mrs. Ashfield. Why should he not, he asked himself, since it was so small a thing to do, and it gave her pleasure? He had worked, too, on the small canvas at every spare moment, carefully placing it out of sight in the intervals. He had by no means put out of his head the idea that had come to him when Mrs. Ashfield, on her visit to the studio, had stood before his spring picture. On the contrary, the wish that she might give him his third figure had so taken possession of his mind that he had never been able to give another thought to the question of any other model posing for it. He knew very well, though, that he would have to decide very soon now on

this question, and that he really did not intend to ask Mrs. Ashfield to pose. It was merely a longing that he was allowing himself to play with and dwell upon unduly—a longing which it gave him pleasure to imagine realized. If he had been asked why he was working at the sketch of her face, he would have replied that he did not know, but that he could not help it.

One evening he went early to the Manlys', and, of course, found Ethelyn alone, as he had expected. They often snatched a couple of hours together in this manner before Gerald arrived, and, in the present period of close application to his work, such a reunion formed their sole opportunity of intimate conversation. To-night Ethelyn delighted Clinton by reading aloud some of their favourite poetry—a form of enjoyment they had rather neglected of late.

'I wonder,' said Ethelyn suddenly, 'why we don't write each other any more of those long love-letters we used to. Even if I do see you nearly every day, it would be nice to have long letters as well, instead of our short notes. I was only thinking to-day—such a flood of things came into my head, and I thought I should like to be saying them all to you. But they pass by and never come to one again. The same kind of thoughts rise as one writes, and sometimes I feel as if I could write on and on for ever. All that

is in me flows out—only for you to read. It is not the same in speaking.'

'Which of us is to begin?' asked Clinton; and then he laughingly suggested they should write simultaneously and let their letters cross.

Enchanted, she stooped to kiss his hand which was near her, when Gerald entered in time to witness it.

'That was very nicely done,' he commented.

'You come in like a detective,' said Ethelyn, unabashed.

'Talking of detectives,' said Gerald, 'I just stumbled up against Warlock-Jones. He was walking in the moonlight, and had a sort of romantic look about him.'

'He must have been at work on a new theory,' suggested Ethelyn. 'He naturally would look romantic then, as all his soul goes into his work.'

'He has certainly succeeded in weaving himself into our lives,' said Gerald. 'I almost feel as if he were one of the family. But, to tell the truth, I'm finding the mystery getting a bit stale, and, though I don't think Warlock-Jones at all a bad sort, I do wish he had succeeded in explaining it by now.'

'I think we're all pretty much of the same opinion,' said Clinton, remembering what Mrs. Ashfield had written to him a few days previously.

'If he would only explain to one what he was doing, it would be so much more interesting,' put in Ethelyn. 'He paid me no end of compliments, but I couldn't get a word from him, though I made it a point to try and melt his hard heart. You won't believe it, Jack, but I even flirted with him a little.'

'A little!' ejaculated Gerald. 'I should call that flirting outrageously, but, of course, I'm no authority. By the way,' he continued, 'I slapped Warlock-Jones on the back—he doesn't mind that sort of thing, you know. "Well, old man," said I, for we became quite pals the other evening talking over our respective student days. His training was entirely medical at first, and he passed some years at the same hospital as myself —years before me, of course. "Well, old man, how are you getting along with the mystery?" He seemed quite startled at first, and I'm afraid my whack on his back rather knocked the romance out of him. He laughed when he recognised me, and then he said: "Oh, the mystery!" And I said: "Yes, the mystery!" He seemed to be thinking a moment, and then he said: "Well, I'm d——d!" That's all I could get out of him. If he had d——d the mystery, he would have given expression to his annoyance. As it was, he only expressed his bewilderment. You see, Warlock-Jones is a thorough gentleman.'

CHAPTER XIII.

On the very Thursday Ethelyn and Mrs. Ashfield were to join him at tea-time, Clinton was rather surprised to get a note from the latter by the first post. He broke open the envelope with a sense of disappointment, naturally expecting to learn that something had occurred to spoil the arrangement. However, he was glad to find that the letter falsified this anticipation.

'Dear Friend,

'Although I am coming to see you and dear Ethelyn to-morrow afternoon, I can't resist writing to tell you what has happened to-day. I am so full of it that I can't possibly wait, and then, you know, it's the sort of thing one couldn't tell before another. Not that Ethelyn hasn't a right to share all your secrets, but this is my secret, not yours. That's why I want you to keep it.

'By the way, I wonder if Ethelyn knows we write to each other sometimes. Of course, she

knows you and I are friends, and I am sure she is very pleased indeed that this is the case. I don't for one moment think she would mind at all, or grudge me the pleasure I get from your sympathetic letters. Yet, somehow I, at least, have not mentioned the fact to her—I don't quite know why. I haven't really looked into myself very deeply; I only know that I just enjoy having the feeling that we are having this correspondence all to ourselves. Just like a woman, isn't it?

'And now for the news. A certain fact at which I hinted in my last has proved to be true—I mean the one to which you opened my eyes by telling me how differently Mr. Warlock-Jones impressed himself on you than on me. You remember my suggestion that perhaps he had been making love to me? Although I wrote that to you in jest, I had a sort of intuition—which was really more than a mere feminine intuition, as it had a solid basis of fact—that it might be really true.

'Dear friend, it was true!

'Mr. Warlock-Jones first tried to get me into a loving condition by performing a curious conjuring trick, which I won't bore you with. I knew how to do it myself when I was a little girl of six, but I've forgotten it. Then he went on to suggest I should marry him. I won't give you details of the scene, as it would be wrong of me to

make fun of him. He is so much in earnest, poor man!

'Of course, you want to know my answer to him. Well, I told him that if he solved "the mystery" within a fortnight I should be ready to marry him, say in a year's time. If he failed to do it within the fortnight, he was to confess the task beyond his power. To this he eagerly assented, and as he had no claims upon me yet, he had to content himself with kissing the hem of my gown, which I graciously permitted.

'Ethelyn tells me she is posing every day. I shall be ever so interested now in the picture.

'Believe me,

'Yours ever,

'NELLIE.'

Clinton could not help shaking with laughter as he recalled Gerald's account of how he had met the romantic detective in the moonlight. What a delicious idea of Nellie to impose that condition on him! It was a flash of genius.

But, growing more serious after a while, Clinton began to wonder whether Warlock-Jones, equally by some inspiration of genius, might not really succeed in winning—Nellie.

Nellie! He had come to discard the 'Mrs. Ashfield' in thinking of her. It somehow seemed

quite natural she should have signed herself to-day by her first name alone.

Ethelyn arrived each morning, now that she was posing, as soon as various domestic duties had had her attention; and during these days Clinton took care to put his sketch of Mrs. Ashfield carefully out of sight in his bedroom, though he always brought it out again as soon as Ethelyn left him. And the sight of it seldom failed to tempt him to put in a fresh touch here and there.

The moment Mrs. Ashfield rang to-day, Ethelyn abandoned her pose and flew to open the door. The 'inevitable aunt' was not with her. Mrs. Norton, she explained, had had to go back to her own home in Newport; it had, indeed, been very kind of her to stay in London so long.

Clinton felt quite glad to hear this, for on the last occasion he had not been able to breathe quite freely in her presence. She had, in fact, been a sort of dead-weight on the conversation, and, though well-meaning, she was really not the sort of person, he told himself, who harmonized with his temperament.

Both women seemed to be in a merry mood, but what most struck Clinton to-day was the unmistakable fact that Ethelyn bore the greatest admiration towards Mrs. Ashfield. He was a bit startled at first, because he had not quite realized

this before, though Ethelyn had all along been very enthusiastic about her.

But soon he found himself accepting the fact with pleasure. Was not Nellie one of those rare women who had it in their power to make other people happy merely by their presence? And it was good to feel she was being appreciated at her true worth!

Every now and then a gleam flashed from Mrs. Ashfield's eye to his, and he knew it to refer to the secret—her secret—which Ethelyn did not share. In a subtle way he seemed to be carrying on another conversation with her alone, side by side with the one in which all three were taking part.

'I am forgetting the flight of time,' said Mrs. Ashfield, at length, jumping up suddenly. 'Besides,' she added, assuming a maternal manner, 'you two children must be wanting to say such a lot to each other, and I'm sure you must be raging against my being stuck here all this while.'

'What nonsense!' said Ethelyn. 'I'm sure Jack's awfully tired of me now that he's been having me here all day long.'

'And Ethelyn of me, too,' added Clinton.

'Then, I'm certainly not going to encourage you in your naughtiness; I shall not stay a moment longer. If only you had both confessed to think-

ing unsayable things about me, I should have gone off perfectly happy.'

The two women kissed, Ethelyn stooping to Mrs. Ashfield and affectionately encircling the tiny waist with her long, firm arm.

'She is quite lovely!' commented Ethelyn. 'If my brain were as quick as hers, what nice letters I should be able to write you, Jack dear.'

Clinton started a little.

'What nicer letters can I want than yours, dear?' he asked.

Ethelyn sat silent, then she said:

'Jack dear, I want to say something, but you mustn't be angry.'

Her words gave him some apprehension, but he took her hand and pressed it gently in encouragement to her to proceed.

'I want to confess I haven't been satisfied with your last two letters, dear. They seemed to want something; they were almost dry and matter-of-fact. I don't mean quite that, and, indeed, I don't believe I quite know what I do mean, dearest. Only they both seemed so ordinary—just like love-letters one might read in a book. I did not feel YOU in them. That is just what I wanted to tell you. It makes such a difference to me to feel your heart beating behind every word.'

'I am very sorry. I love you, dearest,' he

exclaimed consolingly, drawing her to him. 'I fear I am not very skilful with the pen. I am only a painter.'

'But you have written me letters that I treasure,' she protested. 'Forgive me,' she went on after a pause. 'I dare say I am inconsiderate to expect you to write to me now. Of course you must put all of yourself into the picture.'

'Not all, Ethelyn,' he murmured huskily. 'We shall write to each other again to-night, and you shall see how much of myself I am able to give to you.'

He could see she was delighted, but a moment later he noted with surprise that a change had come over her face.

'I forgot, dear; I meant to ask you to come to us to-night. You must put off the letter. You know I am always fretting about the way Gerald has to work. Well, I'm sure it is telling on him fearfully. Last night he sat in front of the fire, looking, oh, so tired! His forehead was quite wrinkled, and his expression so gloomy that I felt quite alarmed. He did not even attempt to take down a book. I had much rather he said the most awful things he can think of than have him sit there in such frightful silence. This morning at breakfast he was just the same, and I could hardly get him to swallow a morsel. I tried to get him into a better mood by saying I believed

that, to judge from his appetite, he must at last have contracted that disease of the stomach he has often spoken about. "I do wish you'd be more serious, Ethelyn," was all I could get from him. I want you to come and try and brighten him up. Of course, he'll force himself to talk to you, and once he begins, he may get taken out of himself.'

Clinton kissed her *au revoir*, promising to do his best. Like Ethelyn, he was much concerned about this change in Gerald. True, Gerald had a giant's power of endurance, but even that must not be abused. Surely a doctor had a right to keep his work within reasonable limits as well as other mortals. He must really have a serious talk with him.

He joined Ethelyn again a little after nine o'clock, for Gerald was due about half-past nine. At ten he had not arrived. At half-past ten Ethelyn began to exhibit symptoms of uneasiness. Perhaps he was seriously ill. It was near eleven when they at last heard the fumbling of his key in the latch. Clinton's heart sank as he immediately remarked the change in Gerald's face.

'My dear Gerald, you are quite haggard!' he exclaimed, placing a sympathetic, caressing hand on the doctor's shoulder.

Gerald looked at him for a moment as if in surprise, and Clinton fancied he detected a quick,

meaning light flash from his eyes, as if indicating he was fully aware of his growing coldness to Ethelyn.

'Nonsense, Jack! I'm all right,' came the answer, after a moment of hesitation. 'I'm only just a bit tired.'

Clinton assured him he certainly looked more than tired; but Gerald scarcely replied, for he had moved across the room to Ethelyn, whom he kissed tenderly. With bent head, Clinton came and stood near them, unable to blind himself to the fact that Gerald had carefully avoided shaking hands with him.

'Don't reproach me with being late,' went on Gerald, as Ethelyn's lips were evidently about to move; 'you know a doctor is not master of his time.'

He sank heavily into a chair.

'The same old reason,' said Ethelyn, vexed almost to tears. His words had roused again all her resentment against the occupation that apparently left him no life of his own.

Clinton stood by in great distress. He wanted to speak, but knew not what to say. With his sensitive woman's organization, which felt much that was never expressed in words, he knew that Gerald was hoping he would shortly take his leave.

And he had come especially to talk to the doctor, and coax him into a brighter mood!

The clock on the mantelpiece struck eleven, but the silver strokes, sounding distinct through the room, seemed to him but to intensify the common constraint.

'Well, Jack, how's the picture getting along?' asked Gerald, when the servant had brought him his beef-tea.

Clinton tried hard not to suspect that the geniality of the question was forced.

'Rather better than the mystery,' he answered, conscious, however, that his own note of gaiety was likewise forced.

A beginning once made, it was easy to dispel the first frigidity. Ethelyn, glad of any conversation on the part of Gerald, at once became enthusiastic, declaring from the progress Jack had already made with her figure she was quite sure she would be even a greater success than last year.

'I'll try and run in to-morrow for a minute to see it,' said Gerald.

'How nice!' exclaimed Ethelyn. 'You know, of course, I shall be there.'

'Do you pose the whole day?' asked Gerald. 'I might want to criticise and say "awful things," as you denominate my utterances, and I thought it might be best to snatch a moment when——'

Pleased that he was beginning to be his old self again, Ethelyn broke into a peal of laughter.

'Why, I just love to hear your "awful things," and would not miss any of them for the world,' she said audaciously.

It was Gerald's turn to laugh.

'That's taking an unfair advantage,' he grumbled. 'But perhaps it's only a clever stratagem to make me turn over a new leaf.'

But Clinton had read a different meaning into Gerald's expressed desire to say "awful things" to him, a meaning confirmed by the doctor's little hint that he would prefer to make his call at the studio when Ethelyn was not there. Nor could Clinton get rid of the idea that Gerald's feelings towards him had changed, and when he said good-night he marked that the latter's hand-shake, though not withheld this time, lacked the usual cordiality.

He did not go home at once, but walked alone on the heath in the dark night, feeling miserable, and apprehensive of coming disaster.

CHAPTER XIV.

CLINTON had arrived at a stage when he no longer dared read his own soul, fearing he should discover therein that the true tale was not the one to which he still clung with desperation. Well for him was it that but two weeks were left him in which to finish his picture, for the necessity of giving almost every thought to his work saved him from dwelling on the change he more than suspected was coming over the position.

However, it was a great relief to him, since he had been looking forward to the angry reproaches of a brother, keen to note this threatened gradual slipping away from his sister, to find Gerald perfectly cordial again when he made the threatened descent on the studio. Perhaps as yet the doctor suspected nothing. Certainly he gave no sign of the promised 'awful things,' not even in the shape of art criticism; and Clinton allowed himself to believe that Gerald's strange demeanour of the evening before must have been

entirely due to fatigue. But the peace of mind so gained was lost again when he attempted to write the promised long letter to Ethelyn.

He began to be conscious that he was looking upon it as a task, and before he had reached the bottom of the second side it was forced upon him, from his painfully slow progress, that his unwilling brain was but acting under the urging of a naked sense of duty. Try as he might, the result was stiff, conventional, and lacking the breath of life. His true self was not in it. Everything his pen wrote was but a forced echo—a mocking echo—of what he had written to her before, and there seemed nothing else left for him to say to her. A love-letter, like a work of art, should be an inspired product, he told himself, spontaneous in spirit at least, if not in expression. But he seemed to have lost the power of pouring out his self to her, and he was now glad to shield himself with the very excuse she had put into his mouth. Once let him get his picture sent in —and all would be as before!

But the third figure kept on bothering him day after day. If only Mrs. Ashfield would pose for it, he felt his hand would be nerved to paint it at white-heat. In face of the letters she had written him, he knew he might safely take it for granted she would not refuse if he asked her. But, then, Ethelyn ought to have been consulted, or, at

least, told of this idea of his long before. He could scarcely pretend that it had come to him only just now, and all of a sudden.

On the other hand, he felt that, however charming Mrs. Ashfield might be, there should be strict limits to their intimacy; and that, perhaps, her posing to him for one of the figures in his picture might, under the present particular circumstances, be considered outside those limits. He did not conceal from himself that he had conceived the possibility as much for the pleasure her society gave him as for the sake of the picture, though the latter consideration did, without doubt, influence his wish considerably. And he therefore told himself he ought to deny himself this pleasure, and to be content with the correspondence he interchanged with her, and an occasional opportunity of conversation. If he had not had an uncomfortable sense of guilt, he would further have told himself that he was making a great and quite unnecessary fuss about a very trivial matter.

Ethelyn's figure was by now finished—at least, so far as not to necessitate any further sittings on her part; and Madeline had sat yesterday for the last time. The third figure, however, was still only roughly sketched in, and he would have to come to an absolute decision about his last model that very day. Meanwhile, he worked on

the picture as a whole, putting in a touch here and there, and attending to the general effect.

Suddenly he became aware that the bell was being pulled violently, and then recollected vaguely it had sounded in his ears about half a minute before, and that in his absorption he had taken no notice of the first ring. Elias had already gone, as it was near mid-day. Clinton, who did not want to be disturbed, went to the door rather angrily, but the sight of his visitor arrested his nascent frown.

It was Mrs. Ashfield herself.

'May I come in?' she asked merrily. 'Why, you look quite pleased, and I was really prepared to find you looking black at being disturbed, now that time's so short, even allowing for the fact that you're an angel of a man. You must, indeed, be very much more angelic than even I gave you credit for.'

'I wish it were in my power to live up to your conception of me.'

'What charming modesty! But go on painting. I suppose you can work and listen at the same time. What I've really come about is to ask you to dinner to-night. It's a very short notice, isn't it? But, then, I'm interviewing all my guests in person this morning. You are the last one I have to bestow my blandishments upon. The guest of the evening is to be Mr. Warlock-

Jones. Dr. Manly, who, at the instance of Ethelyn, is taking a holiday all this afternoon and evening, has promised to be of ours. Ethelyn, whom I have just seen, is enchanted, and I am to give you her message that you are to be enchanted as well.'

Clinton felt a little disappointed. He would have much preferred Mrs. Ashfield to be calling without any specific reason; the fact that she was here, not only with Ethelyn's knowledge, but bringing a message from her, took all the romance out of the visit, and made it seem quite proper and almost prosaic. However, he could not but murmur his thanks, and say that he bowed to Ethelyn's injunction.

'Only because it is Ethelyn's injunction!' exclaimed Mrs. Ashfield, in a tone of evident dissatisfaction. 'I feel sure that the fact of my being the hostess doesn't count at all. Your devotion to Ethelyn is really charming, and wins my approval as a mere spectator. But here you must admit I am concerned a little as well, and, if I am so completely ignored as that, I shall have a right, merely as a woman, to feel just a little bit jealous, to say nothing of wounded vanity.'

'It is really unkind of you, Mrs. Ashfield, to embarrass me with such a speech. I am only a man, and therefore far too clumsy to answer it. So, instead of stammering and blushing in the

attempt to say something adequately gallant, I shall express my conviction that you do not in the least believe what you reproach me with.'

'What use is denial, when you see through me so easily? I plead guilty. What penalty do you inflict on me, Sir Judge?'

He dared not look round to meet her laughing glance, but obstinately kept his face towards his canvas. An answer did pass through his head—it would have occurred to any man at such a question—but he was strong enough to keep his lips glued against it. A seductive picture, too, of what her face must be at the moment floated before him. He did not want to have the appearance of hesitation, yet he could not collect himself quickly enough to make any plausible reply. He felt she must be aware of his embarrassment, and was therefore relieved when she resumed, almost immediately:

'What a terrible question I've put to you! I only just realize it.'

If her question had been a bit of intentional audacity—he put from him as impossible the dim suspicion that it had—this further remark of hers would have been still more audacious. With an effort, he managed to smile good-naturedly, that being an adequate answer this time.

'But you will be wondering why this sudden reunion this evening,' she went on.

'You don't mean to say Mr. Warlock-Jones has——' he began, a sudden thought flowing into words.

'He has not,' she interrupted him, with a merry laugh. 'I should be very much alarmed indeed if he had. Fancy marrying a master detective, and being doomed all one's life to listen to his gruesome reminiscences!'

'And to applaud his conjuring tricks,' added Clinton.

'That is only his way of wooing. I rather fancy that after marriage he'd drop those, along with the rest of his pre-nuptial attentions, of course.'

'But what has he done to deserve to be fêted to-night?'

'It's for what he's going to do,' explained Mrs. Ashfield.

'But isn't that rather imprudent flattery?' suggested Clinton.

'On the contrary, it is a reward for the confession I have persuaded him to make. He is to tell us all exactly what his theories are, and what his difficulties. The idea is my own. We are all so interested in the mystery, that I felt sure it would give us the opportunity of a delightful evening.'

'So that's what he's going to do! I misunderstood.'

'Of course you did.'

'His time, though, is nearly up.'

'It is certainly passing. I shall put all thought of the mystery out of my head after that. In fact, I am thinking of travelling.'

He looked round at her sharply.

'For long?' he inquired.

'If I decide to go, it shall be for a good many months. But I must confess that I am only playing with the idea as yet. I find it very fascinating. As you know, I am not very happy at present, and I want some excitement. But enough of myself. Let me praise your picture, for a change.'

'I had much rather hear you talk about yourself than praise my picture.'

'Is my praise worth so little?'

'Again you pretend to mistake my meaning.'

'I plead guilty, Sir Judge,' she repeated, prolonging the last word with a strange smile that thrilled him through and through. His imagination instinctively took up the 'etcetera' suggested by the non-dropping of her voice: 'What penalty do you inflict on me?' echoing tantalizingly in his ears.

His suspicions as to her intentional audacity recurred to him, and this time it was far from dim. Her repetition just then seemed startlingly like implying an invitation. The words this

second time, too, had caught him looking at her, so that to turn away was impossible. He felt his whole self urging him towards her, a strange emotion within him striving to translate itself into movement. But he did not stir one inch.

'You have no definite plans?' he asked, breaking up the terrible pause.

'I have not mapped out any route. So that I've really nothing to tell you yet. I think I'd better praise the picture, after all.'

'How do you think Ethelyn has come out?'

'She is just — kissable! But, on second thoughts, I *won't* praise your picture. I could only say just the usual stereotyped things about it, whereas I should like to tell you what I feel. And that I'm not clever enough to do. I suppose you will be seriously setting to work on the last figure now?'

'Immediately—that is imperative,' he answered.

'Of course you have a model coming in. Is she as pretty as Madeline?'

His breath seemed to leave him as all the longing of the past weeks sought to find expression. He wanted to cry: 'Don't you understand, darling, it is you I want—you, you only!' But he dared not let himself go. If he had had the power to formulate his longings in the guise of a merely friendly suggestion, he might have chanced everything. But he was so strung up

that he could not speak except with a great burst of passion.

He knew he was white as he murmured instead:

'I fear she is not—that is, the one I have in mind. I am writing to her to-day.'

Mrs. Ashfield had stood up, and was still looking at the picture. He felt that she, too, was on the point of speaking, but durst not. The very atmosphere seemed charged with the weight of a secret shared by both, but unacknowledged by either. He had a sense of guilt in common with her as he stood there, unable even to writhe under the torture of this terrible self-repression.

'I shall expect you, then, before half-past seven,' she said at length; 'and I do hope I haven't really hindered you.'

Again he had to suffer a great oppression as he felt all that was in his soul ready to pour forth in passionate protest against this cold, conventional leave-taking of hers.

'I shall be punctual,' he said quietly. '*Au revoir.*'

CHAPTER XV.

THE conversation at Mrs. Ashfield's table that evening had but the most casual reference to the mystery. Clinton learnt that the holiday Gerald was taking was not limited to that afternoon and evening, but that he purposed to go with Ethelyn into the country for the next few days. An arrangement had been made with a *locum tenens*, so that the practice would not be inconvenienced by his absence.

It was not till they were within the cosy, old-fashioned drawing room, and safely out of earshot of the servants, that all faces were turned expectantly towards Warlock-Jones, who occupied a big armchair before the fire. Gerald sat in the chimney-corner to the left of him, whilst Mrs. Ashfield and Ethelyn made love to each other on a settee to the detective's right. Clinton lounged a little to the rear of the ladies.

'As I once explained to Mr. Clinton,' began Warlock-Jones, 'I took care to visit his studio

before that had become an expense, but I fear I saw nothing likely to help me. The only basis I have had to work upon has been a verbatim report of the inquest.' He pulled from his pocket a thick cloth-bound reporter's note-book. 'Here, apparently, all the facts that could be observed or elicited were duly brought to light, and my only chance of success was to subject this report to a most searching examination, and to see whether these same facts really pointed to the conclusion which the coroner, jury, and public alike had drawn from them. Of course, I admit that their tendency to point in one particular direction is undeniable, but there were moments, I know, when the coroner, able man that he is, had other ideas, yet which, after a while, he felt himself compelled to abandon. I was in court during the inquest, and noted very well what he had in mind from time to time. Early in the proceedings, for instance, the coroner considered the examination of Mr. Clinton's man, Elias, as of some importance, but he afterwards abandoned the particular line of thought he had had at the moment. In doing so, he was, of course, influenced by the new evidence that was being given as the case proceeded. Now, it struck me that here was a track that might be followed with advantage. I did follow it, with the result that I feel perfectly sure the Coroner could have extracted valuable information

from this Elias, if he had subjected him to some close questioning.'

'Nonsense!' ejaculated Clinton. 'I beg your pardon,' he went on almost immediately. 'You must not take my exclamation literally; it was simply an expression of astonishment.'

'And a quite natural one, too, my dear Mr. Clinton,' observed the detective, with suave imperturbability. 'I assure you I take it as a compliment. But to proceed. As you know, Mr. Clinton, Elias at the time had been working for Mr. Cyrus Ashfield, and since then he has been employed by him pretty steadily. Elias, too, seems to be more flourishing than he has been for years.'

'All this is interesting,' put in Gerald, as Warlock-Jones paused; 'but to what on earth does it point? I must confess that you make me feel quite thick-headed.'

'Perhaps you will soon have an opportunity of exercising your ingenuity, when I hope you will be able to raise yourself again in your own estimation,' said Warlock-Jones good-humouredly. 'But I have not yet finished with the inquest. There is still one very significant fact which I could see the coroner, indeed, took notice of, for I watched his face closely. But it was evident to me that he was unable to connect it with anything else, and that he dismissed it as a merely unre-

lated circumstance. Let me read you the extract bearing on this point.

'In the evidence of Thomas Plumstead, the porter on duty at the gate, occurs the following:

'The Coroner: "You are perfectly sure you noticed everybody who passed out?"

'The Witness: "Certainly, sir."

'The Coroner: "You were not talking to anybody?"

'The Witness: "Only to—— No, sir; nobody in particular."

'The Coroner: "Oh, then you *were* talking to somebody?"

'The Witness (uneasily): "Yes, sir."

'The Coroner: "How, then, were you able to observe people so carefully?"

'The Witness: "I was only talking just for a moment, sir."

'The Coroner: "To whom were you talking?"

'The Witness (hesitating): "To Mr. Barham, sir."

'The Coroner: "Who is Mr. Barham?"

'The Witness (very uneasily): "He's a—a—a—he's a hairynawrt."

'The Coroner (puzzled): "A hairy what?"

'The Witness (loudly): "A hairynawr-r-r-t!"

'The Coroner (his face lighting up): "An aeronaut, you mean."

'The Witness: "Yes, sir."

'The Coroner: "What was he doing on the quay?"

'The Witness (hesitating): "He only came on for a chat."

'Beyond this, I have not been able to discover anything in the report that might throw any light on the matter. I don't mean to say that the whole body of the evidence does not bear upon it, but that all this evidence must be considered afresh in the light of the results to be obtained from working further with the points to which I have now directed your attention—points which were ultimately set aside by the coroner as utterly unimportant.

'Now, to these very points I have managed to add some new and very important ones, which might have come to light at the inquest had the proper lines of investigation been followed. In justice to the coroner, I must say, however, that even the shrewdest of minds might well have overlooked or rejected these. If this were not the case, I fear I should have had little chance of the career that lies behind me; so that you would naturally expect me to be very lenient towards those who have failed to accomplish the tasks in which I have succeeded.'

Warlock-Jones paused a moment to smile, and was pleased to find that his audience did not even then relax its attention.

'My first business,' resumed the detective, 'was to make inquiries about the various parties upon whom my suspicion had fallen, and I can safely claim that, in my case, suspicion is very much more than a mere crude instinct. It is the result of a new mental faculty, called into existence and perfected by the many years of experience I have had of this kind of work. I don't mean you to infer from that,' he hastened to interpolate, 'that I am at all getting advanced in years. I began very young, for I assure you I was incredibly precocious. It has been an exciting time all along, but I'm sure I don't know whether I've really tasted of life and happiness as most men understand it.'

Warlock-Jones sighed, and for a moment appeared lost in philosophic reverie.

'But, as I was saying,' he went on, 'my acquired mental faculty went immediately to work the moment my brain had mastered all the details of the case. This faculty works with extraordinary rapidity; reasons exactly — without giving me the consciousness of mental effort; and furnishes me with the results at which it has arrived. So that what in another man would be suspicion, and nothing more, in me becomes a conclusion based on the most rigorous and logical processes of thought. The only thing I regret is that these logical processes are uncon-

scious on my part, and that I, therefore, cannot reproduce them. If I were able to do so, my work in most cases would be considerably abridged.

'In the present case I had no doubt that the man talking to the porter in charge of the gate at the Admiralty Pier Station was one of the principal persons implicated. The porter himself, the "uneasy and hesitating" Thomas Plumstead, I look upon as a tool of this Peter Barham. Mr. Cyrus Ashfield is the other principal person concerned, and the man Elias I look upon as his particular tool. So far, however, I do not look upon Elias as actively guilty, but I am sure he was in readiness to act, if called upon, and that he knew the crime was meditated.'

'Crime!' exclaimed Mrs. Ashfield in excitement. 'Do you suggest there has been foul-play?'

'I have no doubt whatever on the point,' said Warlock-Jones.

'All this is indeed astonishing,' said Gerald. 'If you can explain away the miracle, then I shall be able to hold my head high once more. I never was so humiliated in my life as when, by ridiculing the Sensation at a very early stage, I gave Ethelyn an opportunity of crowing over me, which she did most unmercifully.'

'I fear I have not yet succeeded so completely

as that,' said Warlock-Jones; 'but I have got quite far enough to be able to hold out to you the hope of crowing over Miss Manly in your turn. If I can manage just to indicate the possibility of the circumstances being brought about, without the laws of Nature, as they are expounded by the scientists, being in the least disarranged, that surely will be enough for your immediate purpose, even though I have not attained to anything like a solution of the affair. I am sure Miss Manly will not look austerely at me for helping her brother to his revenge.'

'Indeed, I shall admire you tremendously,' said Ethelyn.

Warlock-Jones inclined his head in acknowledgment.

'I must tell you the further facts,' he continued, 'which I elicited by inquiry. In the first place, I must tell you that on the Wednesday which Mr. Clinton has such cause to remember this Cyrus Ashfield was away from his little shop in Canterbury Road, Kilburn, and also on the two days following. I have likewise been able to ascertain that not only he came by train from Dover to Victoria, and thence by omnibus to Kilburn, on the day of his return home, but that he was actually in Dover, and in the company of Mr. Peter Barham, on that very eventful Wednesday. This was a very valuable piece of information.

The man Peter Barham, who was talking to the door-keeper, and who is described as an aëronaut —and, observe, I lay great stress on his profession —is, as was stated, a resident of the town. In winter he lives there with his wife, but in summer he makes balloon ascents in various parts of England, and exhibits his powers as an intrepid parachutist. He has experimented considerably with parachutes, and, I believe, as regards all aëronautical instruments, he has the reputation of being an ingenious inventor. He has a waste piece of land where his house stands, on the outskirts of Dover and on the road to Kearsney. He has there a large shed, where are several balloons ready for inflation, and this last operation is a very simple one, as only coal-gas is employed. Under pretence of being a journalist who wanted to write an essay on modern aëronautics, I called on him—with a letter of introduction, of course—and I found him very courteous indeed. He did not strike me as the sort of man who would have made friends with a young railway porter like this "uneasy and hesitating" Thomas Plumstead, and who would have dropped in at the station just for a casual chat with him.

'There is one more fact over and above those elicited at the inquest to which I attach some importance. Two days after the affair, when all London had lost its head, nobody seemed to take

notice of an unobtrusive paragraph which appeared in some of the daily papers. Let me read it to you. I have pasted it on the cover of this report.

'"A full-sized balloon has been observed by the Danish boat *Horsa*, from Copenhagen to London, drifting due east across the North Sea at a considerable altitude. A long rope, with a grappling-hook at the end, was suspended from the car. As far as could be made out, no persons were on board. The balloon will probably float on till something occurs to make it fall."

'Naturally it occurred to me that it was not impossible that the body that came through your roof, Mr. Clinton, may have fallen from that balloon.'

'Incredible!' exclaimed Gerald.

'But he *must* have come from a balloon, my dear Gerald!' cried Clinton, in excitement.

'I am beginning to get frightened of you,' said Mrs. Ashfield, shuddering.

'My dear Mrs. Ashfield, I assure you I'm a perfectly harmless sort of mortal,' said Warlock-Jones, genially apologetic. 'But let me continue. I have now put you in possession of every additional fact that could at all be ascertained by me. I have necessarily had to make my inquiries about the four men whom I conceive to have been concerned in the matter in the most guarded

manner possible, for, as you will readily understand, it would not have been wise to allow them to get the least hint that anyone was on their traces. I have been to Dover and examined the quay and the Admiralty Pier promenade, and taken exact note of the way in which passengers go on and off the boats. I have also studied the position of Mr. Barham's house, which can easily be reached from the front at night. I have walked to and fro in the dark on a half-dozen different occasions without meeting a solitary person. I have not yet determined how much importance exactly to attach to this fact.

'Now, why I have not succeeded so far in clearing up the whole matter is that my premises are as yet insufficient for constructing a perfect theory.

'I am sure you must find the facts I have selected as being the important ones very suggestive and significant. Indeed, to me they are most tantalizing. As they stand, they promise such a great deal; yet when one comes to work with them, they prove so utterly inadequate. All that is now left for me to tell you is how these facts set my mind working, what theories they led me to form—theories that, unfortunately, require a deal of hypothesis that cannot be verified to make them workable, and in consequence of which I am driven to admit that this

is the most unintelligible case it has ever been my lot to grapple with.'

'It is a pity in a way,' continued Mr. Warlock-Jones, 'that Mr. Cyrus Ashfield's presence in Dover, and his association with Mr. Peter Barham, were never suspected, else both those gentlemen might have been questioned pretty closely at the inquest. As it is, I am obviously precluded from questioning them now, and my case is not yet strong enough to admit of any action being taken against them.

'The first question that occurred to me when I really began to tackle the case was why Mr. Cyrus Ashfield had suddenly gone to Dover on that Wednesday, and why he had been with Mr. Barham. My answer was that he had got wind somehow of his brother's intended journey, and had deliberately planned out a scheme, as crafty and deep as was ever planned by human brain. I have learnt, and have proof, that he was beginning to be pressed by his creditors, though his liabilities were but moderate, and that he did not know where to turn for money. Now, we know that by his brother's death he inherited three thousand pounds, which must have been for him a nice little nest-egg. It has, in fact, not only enabled him to get clear, but has firmly set him on his feet again. Here, then, we have a sufficient motive for the crime. The course of events

seems to me so clear that it is a thousand pities I find it impossible to reconstruct several links in the chain at the most critical and important part of it. I take it, Mr. Cyrus Ashfield must have been an old acquaintance of Barham's, else he could not have gone to him so directly and so deliberately. My theory assumes that he enlisted Barham's services to help him carry out his scheme —for a consideration, of course. Barham consents, and about the time that the boat-train arrives he is in conversation with the station gate-keeper.

'Now, of course, the whole story, as I conceive it, is this: that these men somehow got hold of Mr. Robert Ashfield, and, after immersing him forcibly in the sea, set him adrift in one of Barham's balloons, which, sailing rapidly before the wind, could easily have got to London in less than an hour. The body must have been thrown out of the car by some extra-violent oscillatory movement, and that this took place over Mr. Clinton's studio is an extraordinary accident. The balloon, of course, floated on, the sport of variable winds, and in the course of a day or so it is seen drifting across the North Sea.'

'I follow you very well up to a certain point,' said Gerald; 'but how the dickens *did* they get Ashfield off the boat? He was on it safe and sound at half-past twelve. If I remember correctly, didn't some friend of his have a smoke and a talk with him?'

'That is just the damnable part of it—I beg the ladies' pardons, I'm sure,' said Warlock-Jones. 'I've sat up thinking about it night after night, and I'm d——, I mean hanged, if I can see through the damned thing. I beg your pardon, but, you see, my feelings get the better of me.'

'Could not Barham have followed the boat in his balloon? It would not have been seen on so dark a night,' suggested Ethelyn, with eager interest. 'Then, just at the moment when the balloon was over the ship, Barham might have caught poor Mr. Ashfield with the grappling-hook, and the balloon might have been so low that he got immersed and drowned in the water. He would have got the cut on his head against the edge of the ship by swinging against it. Barham could have hauled him up after he was drowned, and have descended by a parachute when he got over the land again. After that the balloon would go drifting on towards London.'

'I fear the requisite complicated manœuvres would have been impossible to execute. That's just the devil of it. First there was the motion of the ship, and then there was the motion of the balloon; and on such a night, I think, Barham, intrepid aëronaut as he is, would have thought a

second time before venturing an ascent. I fear that, for a hundred reasons, your suggestion is quite impossible, Miss Manly.'

There was a pause.

'Yes, that *is* just the devil of it,' burst out Gerald excitedly. 'The damned thing's beginning to irritate me, too. I'm sure I beg your pardon,' he continued, in a calmer tone; 'but, like Mr. Warlock-Jones, my feelings got the better of me.'

'It is certainly tantalizing to feel one's self so evidently on the track, and yet to be utterly foiled in this way,' said Mrs. Ashfield.

'Perhaps there was no crime after all,' suggested Ethelyn thoughtfully. 'Please don't laugh at me, but couldn't a great strong eagle or vulture, or some powerful bird of prey, have pounced on the body as it came to the surface, and have flown with it at a tremendous speed, letting it drop over London? I'm sure I've read somewhere there is a bird that breakfasts in London and has its dinner in California.'

'It would never have had the patience for that,' said Gerald. 'The appetite of these creatures is far too sharp-set. But seriously, I must say the case does look black against these men,' he went on. 'Don't you think, Mr. Warlock-Jones, there is really enough circumstantial evidence to warrant their arrest?'

'I fear not,' said Warlock-Jones sadly. 'They could easily make up some cock-and-bull story, and my reputation would suffer. I couldn't think of bringing a case into the criminal courts in so incomplete a state.'

'If Barham were already up in the balloon,' said Mrs. Ashfield, 'might not a cyclone have somehow lifted my husband off the boat and thrown him into the car? Look at that cyclone in Paris last summer, that lifted horses and carriages high into the air and threw them into the river.'

'Barham would scarcely have gone up in the balloon in the expectation of a cyclone coming to help him,' said Warlock-Jones.

Meanwhile Clinton had jumped up, and was pacing about the rear of the room.

'I have it!' he cried. 'Splendid!'

'Really?' exclaimed Ethelyn and Mrs. Ashfield, whilst the other two men raised their eyebrows in surprise.

'Why, it's quite simple,' went on Clinton. 'You say that you know Mr. Cyrus Ashfield was absent from London for two days after the Wednesday, which makes it as clear as daylight. Of course, the gate-keeper must have let him through, and he must have gone on to the boat with the crowd. Then the aëronaut must have stolen through, and on some pretext or other have lured

poor Ashfield off the boat. You remember that the station-master was nebulous, and admitted that anybody might have gone on or off for a while without being particularly noticed. This would account for that Mr. ——, that friend of his, speaking to him on board. It was Cyrus, of course, he spoke to. Once they had lured Robert on to the sea-front, which Mr. Warlock-Jones has told us is deserted, they could easily have drowned him, and then set him adrift in the balloon, from which he ultimately fell when it was over my studio. Cyrus must have slipped away, leaving his brother's luggage unclaimed, and quietly crossed again to Dover the next day. He comes into his three thousand pounds, pays his debts, extends his business, and counts on living happy ever after. Of course, the gate-keeper was hand-in-glove with the others.'

'That is an extremely brilliant explanation,' said Warlock-Jones, 'and I may say it represents my first theory, just as it came into my head. The unfortunate part of the business is that Cyrus Ashfield stayed in Dover the whole three days at a sort of coffee-shop, where he paid a shilling a night for his bed. I could tell you exactly what he had to eat at every meal. Then how about the clothes? And although it is true that Barham's place is easily accessible from the front, you must remember what grave risk they would have

incurred by carrying a dead body through the streets.'

'Well, why could they not have got him to go to Barham's house of his own accord?' asked Clinton. 'Might not Barham have occasion to use a tank of sea-water for his operations or experiments?'

'It was the very idea that made me call on Barham, as I've already told you. There was nothing on his premises that escaped my observation. Certainly there was nothing of the kind you suggest. Barham was not even experimenting just then. He expressed his regret that I had called at such a bad time. But even if he had such a tank, you have still to deal with the other difficulties I have mentioned, and which, to me, appear insuperable.'

'You said before that Elias was concerned in the matter,' said Clinton, after a pause. 'So far as we've gone, I don't see how he comes into it at all.'

'I confess that here I haven't got very far beyond my instinct. When I first began my analysis of the affair, Elias was the first person around whom my mind began to play. Knowing him to be closely connected with Cyrus Ashfield, I made it my business to ascertain this Cyrus's movements on the day in question, which ultimately brought out the new important facts I

wanted, and led to my formulating my theory. Everything having fitted together so smoothly, I am loath to believe that the person with whom my chain of thought began is disconnected from the affair. I have already said that I am inclined to believe that his part was not an active one; my opinion is he had told Cyrus of your absence, and he was in readiness to dispose of a body by dropping it into your studio through the top-light, which he knew how to open. Probably that was some earlier scheme, which had to be abandoned through Robert Ashfield's sudden journey to Ostend. Elias was, no doubt, quite outside the confidence of this Cyrus, but was merely ready to act for a sum of money and for assured constant employment. That there must have been something between the two is rather corroborated by their present relations. Elias is quite flush of money now.

'What I have, so far, put before you represents the workings of my mind up to yesterday. But yesterday evening a very curious idea came to me—which, I admit, I find a very unpleasant one, and I am sure you will all join with me in hoping it is not the truth. But since it has come to me it must be faced, and I must certainly not shrink from examining it. Mr. Clinton and Mrs. Ashfield, who were present at the inquest, will, no doubt, remember that some ingenious juryman

got a notion that the deceased might be a twin brother of Robert Ashfield, and that, therefore, the two deaths, though simultaneous, were quite independent. He therefore raised the question as to whether a twin brother had ever existed, and, to his great astonishment, was told that not only such a person existed, but that he was actually in court—which rather disposed of the juryman's theory. Now, I can go one better than that gentleman. The notion that has come to me is nothing else than the strong possibility of Mr. Robert Ashfield being still alive!'

There was a movement of surprise.

'I do not mean to suggest that that part of the notion is the unpleasant part. Suppose, now, that Mr. Cyrus Ashfield were the person found in your studio, Mr. Clinton, and that Mr. Robert Ashfield were at the present moment carrying on his business. You may remember I once mentioned to you, in the course of a chat we had together, that I was surprised at the sudden energy developed by Mr. Cyrus Ashfield after twenty years of comparative sloth.'

'Do you mean to infer that my husband had a hand in the murder of his brother, and is now taking his place?' demanded Mrs. Ashfield, rising white and indignant.

'It is a possibility,' said Warlock-Jones, with all the sang-froid of his profession. 'In which

case the accomplices would be your husband, Barham, and the gate-keeper. Mr. Robert Ashfield may have changed places with his brother after you had left him, and may have continued to occupy his room at the coffee-shop I have mentioned. Now, it will be seen at once that while this new theory of mine presents every difficulty that my first one did, there are, in addition, quite a host of extra things that seem against it. And while, in support of the first theory, there was, as we have seen, quite a sufficient motive for the crime, there seems to be no motive at all for Mr. Robert Ashfield to have wanted to rid himself of his brother. And, of course, it seems impossible that a man in so magnificent a position should have voluntarily sunk to the rank of a petty shopkeeper, content with the three thousand pounds to come to him from his own fortune.'

'On what, then, do you base your assertion of its plausibility?' asked Gerald.

'On my Instinct,' answered Warlock-Jones, with proud emphasis. 'I have the feeling that the Truth of the affair has at last come to me. Much as I should regret this version of the matter to represent the actual facts, I have the strongest belief they do. And you remember what I have already explained to you about the working of my special mental faculty.'

'On what lines, then, do you purpose to work in order to establish this new view of yours?'

'I cannot say,' said Warlock-Jones. 'I am relying upon an inspiration to come to me.'

'You quite startled me,' put in Mrs. Ashfield. 'Much as I respect your judgment, I must confess I don't believe one bit in your theory. Of course, the idea is very clever, but I fancy the old one is better. However, if you get your inspiration ——'

Mrs. Ashfield broke off meaningly.

'I hope to convince you,' returned Warlock-Jones. 'Of course, you understand how much I shall regret having to do so'—here a look passed between him and Mrs. Ashfield, which was not lost on Clinton—'but all my life I have had to sacrifice my perosnal self to my profession, and I must not shrink from repeating the sacrifice.'

There was a silence. Gerald rose at length and announced his intention of going home, as he would take the opportunity of retiring early.

'I have an idea,' he continued abruptly. 'Suppose I spend my little holiday at Dover. It would just amuse me walking round and examining the Admiralty Pier, and the scene of all those complicated manœuvres. What do you say, Ethelyn?'

'I think that would be delightful. Of course, you're quite sure, Jack, you won't want me again?'

'Perfectly,' said Clinton. 'I'll be painting in my third figure from the model the whole time.'

'I've rather a notion that Dover would help me to get my inspiration,' said Warlock-Jones suddenly. 'There's nothing like being on the spot. Have you any objection, Dr. Manly, to our going down together to-morrow?'

'Charming!' said Gerald enthusiastically; and Warlock-Jones being quite prepared with a note of the trains, a rendezvous for the morrow was arranged there and then.

CHAPTER XVI.

SEVERAL days passed before Clinton heard again from Mrs. Ashfield. A brief note one morning announced that she would come in the afternoon, as she wished to consult him; and he, becoming impatient as the time grew nigh, sent the model home, though it was much earlier than usual.

'Dear friend!' was Mrs. Ashfield's affectionate greeting, as she gave him both her hands. 'I hope you do not mind my coming to you so soon again.'

He murmured some commonplace protest against her remark, and she gave a little laugh.

'We are both very formal to-day, but we are going to thaw before your lovely fire. I will just loosen my jacket. It is curious what a difference a particular four walls and roof makes to one,' she continued musingly. 'I always feel happy in this studio. But you will be wondering what it is I have to say to you. There is so much that I really don't know where to begin. By

the way, I had a letter from dear Ethelyn. I am sorry that her brother still seems to be depressed.'

'Yes,' said Clinton; 'I think it was rather a mistake for Gerald to go there at all, most of all with Warlock-Jones. He wanted a rest, pure and simple, and now he's probably bothering his brains about the mystery the whole time.'

'Oh, but Ethelyn says that Warlock-Jones goes his own way, and doesn't trouble them too much with his presence. He has even put up at a different hotel.'

'So I understand,' said Clinton. 'All the same, I am afraid Gerald got somewhat excited the other evening at your house. I did myself. And once Gerald's mind starts puzzling about a thing——' And Clinton raised his hands in deprecation without finishing the sentence.

'Well, let us hope that they will make the best of their last two days,' said Mrs. Ashfield. 'I am sure the weather is going to continue fine. But, just imagine, I have had a long letter from Mr. Warlock-Jones as well. I am so glad you were present when he told us about that new theory of his.'

'And does he still hold by it?'

'Now that he has told us about it, that terrific pride of his in what he calls his Instinct would never let him abandon it. He says it has taken

entire possession of him, and that he is now more determined than ever to prove he is right. He begs for an extension of time.'

'But if he is right,' said Clinton, 'then surely he must abandon all hope of—of——'

'Of marrying me,' said Mrs. Ashfield, smiling. 'That is just the subject of his letter. How glad I am to have you to turn to, dear friend! But I know you are glad to help another life to be—well, less wretched than it otherwise might be. That is why I don't scruple to trouble you with my affairs. What do you think this man now suggests?'

'I think it high time you suggested to the fellow that he should cease making any further suggestions to you,' exclaimed Clinton, as angrily as though he were addressing the detective himself.

'I do not wish to be harsh to him. But he will now be satisfied only to vindicate himself in his own eyes. For my sake he will forego all the glory that would accrue to him from a public success. Once he has proved the matter to his own satisfaction, he purposes to let my husband —as he insists my brother-in-law *is* my husband —severely alone. He undertakes to prove to me now what a scoundrel my husband is, and how utterly unworthy he has ever been of my love. I would not argue with him the other evening. I

saw too well his vanity would never let him admit his inspiration was preposterous, as indeed it is. Cyrus would have been energetic enough, but he never had Robert's opportunities. The three thousand pounds, however, must make an enormous difference to him. I do hope that it is not true about Cyrus committing such a crime—only for the sake of money. I cannot believe it. But Cyrus he certainly is, and not Robert. There was sufficient difference between them for me to be sure. Oh, I am so tired of you, Mr. Warlock-Jones. How dare you continue to try and force your love upon me!'

Her eyes blazed as though with anger, and Clinton felt himself kindle at her words. He strode about the studio, whilst she sat so that the fire played on her face. The whole place was dim with the uncertain light of the late afternoon.

'Surely you will not grant him the extension of time he asks for?' he exclaimed, in sympathetic indignation.

'Oh dear no! To-morrow his time expires, and though I cannot deny him my presence, I shall certainly after that forbid any reference to the affair. If he persists with his intentions, then I shall be unable to receive him. I care not now whether he continues his investigations or not. I have had enough, and more than enough. True,

he has amused me a good deal, but I have no longer the heart to be amused.'

Her pleasant, soft voice had sunk lower and lower as she spoke, and her last words were delivered in almost a whisper. They seemed more like a spontaneous echo of her thought than a communication directly addressed to him.

For awhile both were lost in thought. The glow of the fire leapt through the room, showing redder and brighter as the daylight kept fading. Clinton was the first to speak.

'You told me when you last came here that you had some idea of travelling. Have you yet decided?'

His own tones were low, harmonizing with the darkening room, and a certain spirit of meditativeness that seemed to have settled on them both.

'I am in the same nebulous condition as before, I must confess. As there is no absolute necessity for me to make up my mind, I just drift along in the same way, a prey to indecision, which at times seems a sort of lazy luxury. I dare say I shall go. I have a sort of presentiment that I shall not be able to escape any other way from—oh, I really can't mention his name any more.'

'Let us both try and forget him,' said Clinton, still pacing about. This linking of himself with Mrs. Ashfield seemed natural. Perhaps for the moment he fancied that longing wish which he

could no longer keep in the back of his mind had been realized, and that he had a right to speak for both in the expression of a common sentiment.

'At any rate, we need not talk about him any more,' said Mrs. Ashfield. 'There are pleasanter topics—for us both,' she added softly.

'For us both,' he repeated, mentally savouring the words, impressed as they were with the quality of her voice.

'And the third figure—is she coming out a fit companion for the other two?' she continued, almost immediately.

He hesitated.

'Well,' he said at last, 'I seem to be labouring over her a good deal. Somehow, I seem to have lost inspiration, and fear I shall be far from satisfied with her. But time presses now, and the thing must go in—as it is, if I can't improve on it.'

'I quite understand the feeling you must have about it. There are moments when all vitality seems to desert one, and then one feels such a stupid clod. Perhaps a change of model would nerve your hand.'

'I fear I could not get a better model at so short a notice. I certainly know of no better, and there is no time to look for one. I admit I felt she would not be a success from the first.

Perhaps the very entry of this suspicion into my mind has done the mischief.'

Again there was a long pause.

'Do you know,' said Mrs. Ashfield, with some abruptness, 'I have sometimes thought of late that I should have liked to form one of your trio. I may make the confession now that it is too late.'

Clinton stopped his pacing, and turned his face towards her. She still retained the same pensive position, her jacket wide open, her head bent towards the fire. How girlish and dainty she seemed! What a picture she made as she sat there in the dusk, with the light playing on her piquant face! Her voice, too, seemed now to be informed with a subtler quality, to be instinct as with the restrained sweetness of deep emotion; and all the music in him responded to its call.

'Of course, it was only a wistful thought,' she went on, half dreamily, 'one of those odd thoughts that come to one, and that one lingers on.'

Without a word Clinton strode into the adjoining room, and took from it the small portrait he had made of her.

'Look, Nellie!' he cried, as he held it before her in the light of the flames, so that she should recognise it.

She smiled.

'I knew you had painted it,' she murmured.

His eyes sought hers inquiringly.

'I do not mean, of course, that I have seen it before,' she explained. 'I *felt* you were doing it. Oh, why are we not more frank with each other? Why do we keep up this meaningless fencing, this half-hinting at our inner selves? Why did I almost tell you just now a falsehood with my talk of odd, wistful thoughts? Odd, wistful thought!' she went on, her voice rising to a rich, majestic fulness. 'Rather should I have said passionate longing, constant longing that racked me; and each time I looked at the painting with the last figure still untouched, I wanted to cry: "ME, ME, ME! I want to see ME growing under your hand, ME passing through your soul into a new life, ME standing side by side with her of whom I am jealous—yes, madly jealous!" Why should she have been here with you alone day after day, and not I—I, who love you? I envied the very model her privilege. I would gladly have given her all that I have in the world to change places with her! Yet I dared not say a word—I was afraid! And you, too, could I not read in your face that you were tormented by the same thought, the same longing? Do you think I did not know how you were struggling to repress what your whole soul urged you to speak? You, too, dared not; you, too, were afraid. Why? Conscience made cowards of us both.'

He stood there, his hand still holding the picture, rigid, as though paralyzed. His head was bowed as under the storm that swept from her.

'It is true,' he whispered; 'I was a coward. Yes, each time you left me, and I had not dared to say a word of my great desire, I could have thrown myself onto the ground in despair, and have torn the floor, and foamed just like a madman. It is a wonder that I have not gone mad—I who dared not even think—oh, it is terrible, terrible! I can never make her happy now. She has already felt the change in me—already. But she is so good, so true—as yet she does not understand the true meaning, the terrible meaning of what she has felt.'

'But, even if you see me no more, you must not marry her unless you are sure your old love for her can come back again. For her sake I tell you this, because—because I love her as well. I am sincere in this. The ghastly fate of being bound to a man who does not love her must not be hers. She is far too good for that.'

'Yes, she is far too good for that,' he repeated. 'But why do you talk of my seeing you no more? I must see you. Rather the torment of that than of your passing out of my life altogether. But

why even should we be content with torment? Why should three lives be broken when two, at least, might be spared, and the other, perhaps, healed with time. I know Ethelyn. Her nature is not like ours. She can bear pain with resignation, and perhaps in time—she may find peace and happiness in a new love.'

'But these calm natures are deep, and their wounds, too, are deep, though they may not cry out with the pain. If she should never heal——'

'She can at least bear her torment with resignation. As I have said, my nature is different. I am not made to bear such pain; I am more like a little child, Nellie, and such a hurt would murder my very soul. It is not that I am selfish—but I long for the happiness that is in reach, if we do but dare take it. Have we not courage enough now? What is this conscience that it shall stand over us sword in hand when we have but to rise against it to annihilate it? Happiness is a precious thing, Nellie,' he pleaded. 'It comes to few at all. This love of ours is a Divine gift. Shall we scorn it? Shall we reject it? Think for a moment what life is without love. A round of work and meals, and a little play, and much stress of spirit, and tears in the night! As men and women live it, it is a spectacle to make the gods weep to all eternity. But love is here with us now—love that redeems life, illumines and transfigures it. Have we a right to cast it from us? By whom are we called upon to make so great a sacrifice? I cannot believe that life was given us so that we should deny ourselves the one joy it offers! Nellie, I love you. Let our lives be one; let us go away and begin anew, and forget everything that lies behind us.'

He had placed the picture aside now, and held his hands towards her. She took them in hers.

'Sacrifice!' she half laughed. 'Sacrifice is for the strong. Let us both frankly admit—for concealments are vexatious to the spirit—that we are not strong. Oh, is it not delicious to be weak and to give way sometimes, you dear——'

She broke off with a laugh that rang of happiness, and he sank down on the floor and rested his head on her knees. Their hands were still clasped.

'I was going to say "you dear Jack!"' she went on; 'but I can't call you that. Do you know, I've been very angry with you several times for having such a name. It's perfectly impossible. Jack! Ugh! If you had had a prettier name, I should have called you by it long ago, but it always stuck on my lips.'

He laughed in his turn.

'I have five other names that I never use.'

'Tell me them quick, dear, and I'll choose the one that I love best.'

'My full name is John-Neville-Barfoot-Gordon-Temple-Mandeville Clinton,' he recounted slowly.

'Now say them all again, and when you come to the right one I shall kiss you.'

'John-Neville-Barfoot-Gordon-Temple-Mandeville——'

'Stop!' she cried. 'I shall abbreviate them all into Man. There, you dear Man!'

She had taken his head in her hands, and had kissed him on the lips and eyes.

'My dear,' he murmured, a moment later; 'now I know that I have never loved before. This is the real; what I have known has been only phantom love—a mere mockery of love. If I had only suspected—but we men never suspect it till this great ecstasy comes into our life.'

'It is wonderful that you should have come into my life, dear,' she chimed in. 'I have gone back in thought again and again to the moments our existences first touched. Curious how we cannot foresee what is coming along. I first knew your name vaguely, then better from the newspapers, as a rising painter. Then Dr. Manly mentioned to us that his sister was engaged to you, and after that I took particular notice of your picture at last year's Academy. Still, you were a mere name to me—but a name that was somehow growing more familiar daily. But even then it never occurred to me to ask myself what

sort of a man you were. No definite image ever came to me in connection with your name. The next thing that, unconsciously to both of us, brought us nearer to each other was when Dr. Manly was attending my husband about the beginning of last November. We got talking about pictures, and the Doctor naturally mentioned you. And then, as I had already admired you so much, I expressed a wish to possess a small painting of yours, and the Doctor told me there was a nice little landscape of yours on sale at—— I forget the man's name. Well, I bought it. I have since got hold of two or three other things of yours. They have given me such joy! It is hard for me to say the exact moment when I knew I loved you. But your dear face, with its soft eyes and its dreamy look—oh, I love you, I love you!'

It was almost dark now, and in this studio, where the shadows did but add to the mystery and sweetness of the moment, they seemed far away from the whole world. Not a sound came to them in reminder of it.

'And our plans for the future?' he asked suddenly.

'You must leave those to me, dear. My brain will be better than yours for thinking out our course of action. I want to write you a long letter with everything in it so nice and clear that

you will think something specially nice about me. Of course you must finish that picture now with the model you have. Perhaps now that we know we belong to each other, you will find your hand moving lightly again. Ah, you dear Man, how I treasure the happiness that has come to me at last! If you only knew how unhappy I have always been!'

'Always unhappy!' he repeated. 'My poor Nellie!'

'Yes, I have suffered so much,' she went on, in a tone of half-soliloquy that was sweet to him. 'But, of course, you do not know my life.'

'Tell me all,' he said, looking up to her face.

'Sit down here by my side now,' she suggested, and he drew a low stool next to her chair.

She considered a little, the while entwining her fingers amid his locks.

'When I run over it, there seems so little to tell,' she said at length. 'My experience has been more inward than external. That, I suppose, is the reason why I have been so miserable. To begin at the beginning: My father's father was a clergyman, quite unworldly, and only ambitious that his boy should achieve academic honours. My father, who was, if anything, more unworldly than my grandfather, worked his way through college, with the help of scholarships and prizes, and, in spite of his brilliant record, the best position in life that offered itself to him was a beggarly assistant-mastership at a provincial grammar-school. He had to do something for his bread at once, you see.

'Here he toiled for years, unnoticed and friendless, for he was ever the shy student, the retiring bookworm. When he was thirty-five he married my mother, the daughter of a shopkeeper in the town. The details of the courtship I have never known, but at the time the family were anxious to have a "gentleman" connected with them, and I dare say they must have shown my father various small kindnesses. He, poor man! could scarcely have known many women before that; it is easy to let one's mind play about the position, and to understand how he must have longingly looked forward to marriage and happiness, feeling he was no longer a young man, and that the years were flying. No doubt he took the best that life offered him; but in his case the best was rather bad.

'The marriage was unhappy. That, too, is easy to understand. My mother's first showy beauty —I have nothing of her in me, I am thankful to feel—soon vanished. She became just as her younger sister is now—I mean Mrs. Norton, whom you have seen. My father had the humiliation of seeing his wife's family grow wealthy, and insolent in proportion. He wasted away at

last, and died before he was fairly middle-aged. My mother followed soon after—a sudden attack of pneumonia, and all was over!

'I was the only child, and I was bundled off to a Brussels finishing-school, where most of the girls were the daughters of rather well-to-do people. They had been sent there to be transformed into "ladies." Most of them sadly needed the transformation. But the experiment, I fear, was seldom successful. Oh, they were such a horribly vulgar set!—it was not in their natures to be fine. They never suspected that ladyhood, like other forms of genius, is born, not made. But they were sent back "educated," "finished," with the idea well drilled into them that to be "ladies" they had only to be faithful to a certain stock of rules with which they had been equipped. To diverge from one of these rules in the slightest degree would be criminal. I could not analyze it then, but I felt I was not of *them*. My whole being was different. I was hated, though my sensitive nature craved for love. I was not a particularly bright girl, nor particularly stupid—but I was particularly unhappy, always unhappy.

'I well remember when my awakening came. One day I looked round and somehow all the world was different. It was then I first began to be the woman I am now—a person who thought deeply and criticized for herself, though mainly

relying on her own observation and experience. I am loath to believe that such a method was of less value to my development than mere study and reading, for I felt myself expanding from day to day. When I came to read seriously, I was so much the better able to understand and sympathize, having felt for myself all the shades of emotion the great authors had sought to interpret.

'Though I have never known the want of money, I have inherited all my father's indifference to it. At home, my mother's people have never understood me. I was allowed to travel—they could not oppose my restlessness. My meeting with Mr. Ashfield and my marriage to him were alike commonplace. I married him as an experiment—it was the best that life offered. Perhaps you will realize how much the great lines of my existence really resemble my father's. Only he—poor man!—never got his ecstasy, as I have now, dear!

'My husband was kind and good and dignified. He always meant well, though his dignity made him a little bit ridiculous at times. He little imagined the intense life that burned within me! I know he was very fond of me; "very fond" are the two words that will give you the best idea of how his affection struck me. How full of exquisite poetry they are! If I thought *you* were "very

fond" of me, I should kill myself. Sometimes I know he felt genuinely sentimental about me, but he had not the gift of expression, and his sentiment at best was but a lukewarm thing—not the pure fire I have always yearned for. But I never dared talk to him about "pure fire"; he would have thought me mad, and I really had too much esteem for him to frighten or upset him. I really did frighten them at home in the early days. That is why they worried me into marrying; they thought it would make me sane! How I have waited all my life—waited for this to come! I have plodded along through the infinite grayness of the years, longing—oh, so passionately!—for a great ecstasy. I want to be happy—madly happy! Five years are all I demand of life. After that come what may—extinction, darkness! If I be then a mere cinder, I shall at least have burned myself out. And, oh! the joy of burning! the joy of burning! We shall wander through the whole world, you and I, my love—my dearest love!'

'But five years will not satisfy *me*, Nellie. I want a whole eternity with you.'

'This is the first time I ever felt grateful to a man for being greedy.'

There was an interval of silence, again giving them the full sense of sweet isolation.

'I am glad the mystery came, dear,' she resumed, dropping her voice to a whisper, 'because it brought me you.'

'Let us forget the mystery,' he whispered back. 'Let us only remember that we love each other.'

'I fear I have not profited much from the "finish" they supplied me with at that Brussels school. Look how recklessly I trample their rules underfoot.'

'Which of their rules are you ill-treating just now?' he asked. 'You forget I am not familiar with them.'

'You, Man, don't you see that I, the Woman, have been doing all the wooing? According to the rules, that would deprive me of the right to be considered a "lady." But I have won you, dear, and you were worth the exchange.'

'I will re-christen you with a higher title, Nellie—my Nellie. I will call you "Queen."'

'Thank you, Man dear. But you haven't told me yet whether I wooed you nicely.'

'It was delicious. I am so happy, Nellie.'

And as he sat there, his head encircled by her caressing hands, he could only think of her as a mere girl—but a girl with all a woman's passion.

When she rose at last, she would not let him accompany her.

'No, dear,' she said; 'I just came to pay you a visit, and I just want it to be that and nothing

more. I shall remember it as the happiest visit I have ever paid in all my life. Good-bye, dearest!'

It was with a strange, choking emotion that Clinton passed again from the vestibule into the studio, now so desolate without her. He sat down on the same stool, and he still seemed to feel the thrilling touch of her caressing fingers—now on his forehead, now amid his hair, now on his lips. But as he sat on there in the darkness, he became conscious within him of some profound regret. It seemed somehow as if the past hour had been the veriest dream, from which he had just awakened. And this woman who loved him seemed to have vanished even from his very arms like a mocking spectre!

His was almost the mood of one who, after long years of solitude, looks back to a love that once strayed across the line of his life, stayed just a moment, and then passed away for ever; yet in whom the memory and perfume of its infinite deliciousness linger with a strange freshness!

And yet it was but just now that Nellie—his Nellie—had left him!

His whole being seemed to be invaded by her personality, and that of her spirit which remained with him gave him a dainty sense as of the softness of velvet. But that vague inexplicable sadness which haunted his spirit, and of which he

was fully conscious, served in a way to make that afternoon's episode appear far off.

He seemed to be looking back now—to have been allowed one draught of intoxication, that the memory of it might be always with him, though he might never drink again.

He roused himself at last, and sought to kill the evening by running down to the West End and looking in at his club. But he only succeeded in tiring himself, and was glad to get home again. In spite of all the promise and joy with which Nellie had said good-bye to him, he could not see clear before him. What was going to happen next? he kept asking himself. When would he see Nellie again? When should he hear from her? How should he bear himself so that Ethelyn should not suspect? Or would it be best to tell her at once the whole truth?

Tell her the whole truth? No, no, he could not do that. Not because he was a coward, he told himself angrily, guiltily conscious that that suggestion was in his mind. He must act so as to give her the least pain. What end would it serve—this making of a needless scene? When he had once gone, and she could no longer be spared, then let her realize that the blow had fallen and accept it with resignation.

Yet—and he winced as he found himself forced to dwell on the subject—how *would* she bear this

blow? Was it true that her nature was so different from his own and Nellie's? Was it true that, because she was so tall and stately, she could bear pain lightly, and perhaps in time find peace and happiness in a new love? Rather might it be as Nellie had said, that such a nature might be wounded the deeper, even though she might not cry out with the pain. Would her spirit be hurt the less because she was so splendid of body?

He recalled now endless passages from letters she had written him—passages full of rich emotion she had poured out for him alone; and he was forced to confess she was a girl who felt deeply, despite the gracious calm of her demeanour. Why, it was the perception of that very fact that had first drawn him to her!

He could not banish these searing thoughts; and, though he told himself repeatedly he must ignore them and surrender himself wholly to the joy of life which promised to be his at last, he could not at all feel sure that it *was* to be his.

CHAPTER XVII.

CLINTON was calmer the next day, and, as Nellie had prophesied, found himself able to wield his brush with more of his former vigour. All through the day he longed for her to come. But even in her abstention from seeing him he saw but an additional virtue. She, of course, did not wish to disturb him and put him backwards with the picture, now that time was so precious. He must possess his soul in patience.

All the same was her face before him, with its limpid gray eyes, now melting under their long lashes, now flashing and sparkling. Her words, too, rang in his ears: 'I want to be happy—madly happy! Five years are all I demand of life. After that come what may—extinction, darkness! If I be then a mere cinder, I shall at least have burned myself out. And, oh! the joy of burning! the joy of burning! We shall wander through the whole world, you and I, my love—my dearest love!' The memory of the

great passion with which her voice had glowed set him athrob again.

'Perhaps she will come again this evening,' was his hope later in the day. But the evening came and passed without a sign of her, and he had to be content with picturing her writing him the promised letter. 'We men lose our wits altogether in these great moments of life,' he told himself; 'a woman never ceases to be practical. Let me trust in Nellie unreservedly!'

In the morning, however, this letter, about which he had made so sure, did not arrive; and again he bade himself accept that which Nellie deemed best. By mid-day he knew that Gerald and Ethelyn would be home again, but he would not be seeing them before the evening, when he was to dine with them.

He shrank, however, from looking forward to the meeting. When the time came he would just go through it, keeping as unmoved a face as possible. He would have liked to have heard from Nellie, as that would have put his mind in a more settled state, and nerved him to meet the others. His sanguine disposition, too, had begun to assert itself. Ethelyn, he now argued, was a woman of comprehension, and when the first heaviness of the disaster had lifted, she might come to understand, and even to sympathize with him. Besides, she was too noble not to forgive;

too generous to grudge him his new happiness. They might even be friends again some time in the future.

Of course, there was Gerald to be reckoned with; and here Clinton felt himself on doubtful ground. He had already felt on one occasion that Gerald was suspecting him of coldness towards Ethelyn. Looking back now, he felt he had wilfully blinded himself in setting down to the account of fatigue that temporary but marked brusqueness of manner the doctor had displayed towards him the evening he had withheld his hand from him. Once, of course, Ethelyn was pacified, Gerald must needs be content. And any way, thought Clinton, as he abruptly cut short his train of reflection, it was perfectly foolish of him to be thus anticipating the anger of those he was about to treat so badly. If life was to be lived at all, he must just act as he purposed to act, and exclude all else from his mind.

Shortly after the model had gone away for the day, he was astonished by a visit from Ethelyn herself. She looked very beautiful indeed, after her short holiday, and the artist in him could not help uttering an exclamation of admiration.

'You dear Jack!' she said as she kissed him. 'I feel as if I have been away for years. But I have a note for you in my pocket. Guess from whom!'

'I give it up.'

'It's from Nellie—Mrs. Ashfield. Of course, we call each other by our first names now.' She pulled the pink, scented little note from her pocket. 'I promised Nellie not to want to know what it's about, so you may read it in my presence,' she went on. 'Do you know, she took me to task for the readiness with which I made the promise. She said I ought to be a good deal more jealous, and that if *she* were in love with you, dear, she'd want to know the contents of every letter you had—especially of one that came from another woman. If she were in my place, she swore she would open and read it. Isn't she delicious, dear?'

'Well, it can't be anything important,' said Clinton, forcing himself to laugh. 'I'll read it afterwards. Probably some little reunion she is planning. But how is Gerald to-day? and how is the mystery?'

Ethelyn's face clouded.

'I suppose I was so anxious to deliver Nellie's letter before temptation got the better of me, that I've forgotten to tell you how it is I'm here. The fact is, I want to ask you, Jack, not to dine with us this evening.'

He looked at her in surprise.

'The holiday didn't do Gerald a bit of good; he looks quite as ill as he did before we went.

I'm sure I was nice to him the whole time, but I never knew him to be so irritable ever since I've been his sister. He insisted on coming back to-day, though I've tried my hardest to prevent him, and begged him to send Dr. Whiting a telegram to arrange with the *locum tenens* for a few days longer. And then he complained that the journey gave him such a headache. About three o'clock a servant came from Nellie to inquire if Gerald was back, and if so, she hoped he could come and see her as soon as convenient, as she wasn't quite well. He went round to her soon after. It appears she complains of sleeplessness, and she asked him if I could come and sit with her a little, as she was too unwell to go out. Gerald made her up a narcotic, and I brought it to her. She really looks bad, and so I couldn't refuse to give her my company this evening when she begged me to do so as a special favour. She is so fond of me, and I seem to do her such a deal of good. And as Gerald talked about having a lot of letters to write, and then going to bed immediately after, I thought we'd best postpone our dinner till to-morrow.'

Any satisfaction that Clinton might have felt at the postponement of his evening with the Manlys was entirely overshadowed by his concern for Nellie. But he managed to conceal the fact that he was so anxious to read her note.

'I am so sorry everybody is so unwell,' he said. 'But, of course, we must accept the situation.'

'And you, dear—you haven't told me about yourself yet.'

'Oh, I've been working steadily and keeping in good spirits.'

She went on to ask him a few questions about the picture and the sending in, and he showed her, as well as he could in the failing light, what progress he had made during her absence.

'Well, I must hasten back to Nellie,' she said at length. 'She said she would be waiting so impatiently for me. She only thought of giving me the note because I told her I must go and see you. It would not require a reply, she said. But really, dear, I should like you to read it in my presence. I want to feel I can be firm enough not to want to know anything about it all the same. Besides, I want to boast about it to her.'

As he could not refuse without rousing her suspicion, he broke the envelope, read the message, and calmly replaced it in his pocket.

'Just as I thought——' he began, with an almost studied indifference.

She put her hands over her ears.

'I don't want to know—you really must not tell me. Good-bye till to-morrow.'

And in a moment she had gone, hurrying away laughingly as if anxious to combat her curiosity.

Clinton, left alone, took the sheet again from his pocket in the hope that his eyes had deceived him the first time. But the same words stared at him implacably.

'YOU DEAREST MAN,

'I have discovered I am strong enough after all for "sacrifice." I am going away, and shall never see you again. Please accept this, respect my wishes, and do not attempt to come to me before I leave. I send you this by Ethelyn in order that she may bear back from me to you the promise of eternal love that you have made me. As soon as this note touches your hand, we no longer belong to each other. I am doing this mainly for Ethelyn's sake—for I love her dearly; and a little for other reasons which you will know shortly. Dear love, be good to her and try and love her with all your heart and soul, for she loves you as much as I do—how much that is it is out of your power to realize. Never say or do anything to wound her spirit; forget that I ever came between you, and do your best to make her life a happy dream. My own dream of happiness I abandon. Good-bye, dearest.

'NELLIE.'

Yet a third time did he read the letter, then threw it on the fire, so much did it torture him.

When it was burnt, he did all that he had felt it was in him to do in those days when he had let Nellie depart without a word of his love. He cast himself on to the ground, and writhed and foamed as in madness.

When the fit was spent and his mind could work again, he asked himself what it all meant. There was more in that letter than his first reading had impressed on him—more than the mere statement that Nellie had decided their love must not continue. A hidden meaning seemed to flicker and leap out at him here and there, irregular, vague, and always elusive. Whenever his mind was on the point of leaping at it in its turn, it died out mockingly. Strange apprehensions stirred within him ; and he knew not which racked him the more—the fear of some new undefinable disaster he felt to be hanging over him, or the pain of the blow that had fallen.

And, apart from this terrible mood, the position in which he was now placed was as cruel for a sensitive organization such as his as it was difficult. How escape from it? For awhile he thought of leaving all behind him and flying to the other end of the earth. He could not reconcile his spirit to what Nellie suggested ; he could not accept what remained when he had feasted his soul on all that pageant of happiness now so abruptly withdrawn from him.

Had not his mood of the evening before been a prophetic one? Was he not doomed now to sit through long years, savouring the memory of love-joys that had been his but for a moment? And then the thought of the now finished spring picture recurred to him—the three gracious women in the full tide of youth and beauty, fairest of all the flowers in that fair garden. He recalled to mind what Ethelyn had written to him at the time of his first conception of it :

'Yes, I like the idea very much indeed—it will just express your mood and mine!'

Its note of freshness, hope, rejuvenescence, seemed now an unbearable mockery.

If he had given way to his bitterness, he would have rushed at it and rent it.

What remained for him now, to whom the life of the spirit and emotions was the whole of life?

The interpretation of his moods on canvas would afford him distraction, he told himself. Already he foresaw himself painting the old broken man, bending over the winter fire, the brooding light of an olden memory softening the strong gnarled features that should tell of great suffering—a light wherein should be mingled the sadness of regret with the joy of happiness re-tasted.

But what an ironic distraction!

And this picture became a veritable obsession. All night long he saw it before him, painted as by a master-hand; all the burden that lay so heavy on his spirit expressed in it with a grim and almost weird strength that compelled his obeisance. But the face of the man imaged in it filled him with terror, and haunted and oppressed him like a nightmare—for it was his own face he recognised under the rugged features, with their reflection of years of anguish. And he knew he should not rest till he had delivered himself of this obsession, even though he should vomit it forth with his life-blood.

Elias came at eight o'clock, but he sent him away as soon as possible, because he felt he must be alone. And when the model rang, he put her off till the morrow. With a few more touches the picture would be sufficiently finished to go in, and it hurt him even to look at it now.

He put a fresh canvas on the easel, and feverishly began to sketch in the new scheme. The time flew as his brush made quick, nervous strokes, and when the bell rang again, he glanced at his watch, and was surprised to find over two hours had gone by. At first he thought of not attending to the ring, but on its immediately being repeated with some peremptoriness, he went to open the door.

'Is that you?' he murmured mechanically.

The girl—Ethelyn's maid—handed him a note, and breathlessly asked if there was to be an answer.

'DEAREST,' it ran—and from the almost illegible scrawl it was clear it had been written in great agitation,—'The most frightful accident has happened. Poor dear Nellie is dead! Gerald was called this morning, but he was too late. He is in a terrible state about it—he says it is all his fault. His head ached so yesterday after the journey that he weighed up oxalic acid instead of chloral hydrate. I have only just managed to soothe him a little. I am quite crushed myself, but I dare not give way, as I must do my best to cheer him up. Oh, it was a terrible mistake! And to think I carried the stuff to her with my own hands. I'm afraid there is little you could do, so I don't want you to disturb yourself whilst the light lasts, now that time is so important to you. I am quite broken-hearted, and long to cry, but dare not.

'ETHELYN.'

'Tell your mistress I shall come as soon as possible.'

The girl hurried away. He shut the door behind her. Then, stumbling back into the studio, he stared about vacantly, and wondered if he were mad.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CLINTON did not take up his brushes again, but threw himself across a couch, where he remained in a long torpor. When he arose eventually the fire had gone low, and he had an intense feeling of cold. He piled on some coals, and, huddling himself together, stretched out his hands miserably towards the flames. He felt bent and old, realizing with a grim smile that he had become in reality the man of his dream-picture.

Nellie was dead! Nellie was dead! Gerald had inadvertently killed her! And Ethelyn's was the hand that had brought her the means! It seemed like some grim judgment of Providence!

But her spirit was still living with him, here where they had sat together side by side. Her face rose up, sparkling with the fulness of vital light, her eyes eager and glad, her lips firm and sweet. Her voice, too, thrilled him again—that voice which had seemed to him so wonderful, which had conveyed to him so much music and

passion, now with the unrest of storm, now with the gentle sweetness of a singing-bird.

He wondered that he was so calm now, alarmed lest it might be one of those calms that are more terrible than tempests! Perhaps the news had not really sunk into him yet. Its truth his brain had, of course, accepted, but he had not yet realized it with his whole being.

Once or twice he thought of going to see Ethelyn and Gerald, but he hesitated. Perhaps the sight of the man who had made so terrible a mistake might madden him, and who could say what might not happen?

Yet he had promised to go, and the afternoon was fast speeding by. A letter from Gerald put an end to all indecision. In so far as Clinton had room in him for any further emotion of any kind he was somewhat astonished, for such a letter was usually as brief as it was rare. But there seemed to be a good many closely-written sheets as he opened the envelope, and he resumed his seat in the full expectation of receiving some new blow, though with a sort of feeling he had arrived at that point when further blows are no longer felt. He read the letter now almost without flinching.

'MY DEAR JACK,

'This is going to be a very long letter, but I fully owe it to you. When you have read

it through you will immediately destroy it without my asking you to do so. I am writing it on my return from a "professional" visit to Mrs. Ashfield, or, since she was "Nellie" to both of us, let me refer to her as Nellie throughout.

'As you know, I have just come home from Dover to-day, and I am feeling very tired. Ethelyn has just gone off with the narcotic I have made up for Nellie, and will stay with her the whole evening. By the way, we left poor Warlock-Jones quite broken-hearted about his mystery.

'Though I shall finish this to-night, I shall not post it till after I have seen Nellie to-morrow. I expect to be called to her house early in the morning! On my way home I shall put it in a letter-box, so that by the time you receive it—well, let me not anticipate.

'Jack, you never suspected that I have had one great passion in my life. I rather pride myself it would have taken a shrewder man than you to suspect it. But I was never a hypocrite. All I did was to keep it secret. As for the cynicism which you and Ethelyn have consistently refused to take seriously, let me assure you I have always been in earnest about that, and have always said exactly what I thought—except to my patients, of course; but that was part of the cynicism. All my life I have lived as godless as

I die. Die! Don't take fright at the word. You know me well. I have timed everything exactly, and even if you now throw this aside and rush to me, you will arrive too late. On the other hand, if you have patience to finish, you will agree with my action, and see that my life had to end.

'My fatal passion began two years ago, when I paid my first professional visit to the Ashfields. But don't imagine that fact made any change in my views. There were moments when I could look at this love with my brain, and I had no delusions about its being divine. Neither did this want of delusion hinder me from yielding myself up to the emotion like any other member of the human race. I do not deny, though, that my seeing through the sham of the world and life has deprived me of much happiness that the ordinary mortal enjoys, but there have been mental compensations.

'I became friends with Nellie. After the uncongenial companionship of her husband, she, brilliant little body that she was, was glad of the daily half-hour's clandestine conversation we managed to have together. I found in her a quick and ready disciple. She absorbed all my cynicism, and all my philosophy; like me, she grew to fear neither God nor devil.

'It was I alone who made her life livable,

else, with her tragic possibilities, she might long ago have taken the step she has now taken. But I could not get her to say she loved me, though I pressed my love on her, and made her fully realize its strength. "Perhaps, one day," she said, "I shall learn to love you; but I do not yet." So, for the time, I had to be content with her friendship. Often she said to me, "How I wish I loved you with the same passion that you love me. Such a love has always been my great dream, my great longing." And when again I did all in my power to dazzle her, she shook her head. No, she did not love me yet.

'Yet she gave me all the confidence a woman could give a man. Every thought of her brain, every beat of her heart, she revealed to me, ay, and all the anguish of her spirit—I but use the word in acceptance of conventional modes of expression—at her being tied to a man in whose commonplace veins ran a blood that could never know the exaltation of passion. If you could only have read the letters she wrote me about her sufferings, your fingers would have itched to get at his throat, your feet to trample on his body. Yet, as men of his kind go, he was good and generous, though a strict task-master. His dignity was perhaps the one thing that made him ridiculous. No doubt he suspected that his personality, pure and simple, was insufficient to impress, but,

all the same, he would have done better to leave it unaided. As a steady husband Nellie had not a fault to find with him. He trusted her implicitly, and not her slightest wish was left ungratified.

'But this only made matters worse. For me this is easy to understand. Before I destroy her dear letters, let me give you a couple of extracts from them.

'"To-day," she wrote once—it was a Sunday—"we have been sitting opposite each other all the afternoon: he calm, contented, happy in his worldly success; I with my heart aching, conscious of the chasm between me and him, and knowing it can never be bridged. Suddenly he smiled at me, and said, 'Let me see, Nellie, it will be the anniversary of our wedding the week after next. We must go away on a honeymoon trip,' and he would insist on discussing the thing then and there. Honeymoon trip! He only saw me smile, but if he could only have realized the convulsive shudder that went through me! 'And then, of course, my Nellie must have a little present,' he went on, chuckling; 'what has the little girl set her heart on?' Of course, you understand how his words hurt me."

'Another time she wrote to me:

'"I sometimes wish you had not taken my God away from me, so that I might pray to Him to make my husband a brute to me. Scarcely

anything could give me so much joy as the feeling that I had the right to hate him. He is so generous and well-meaning, so uniformly kind and attentive, that life has become a hell to me. I, who cannot tolerate him, am stabbed to the heart at every gentle word he utters, at every mark and sign of his affection for me. Do you not see in what a constant torture I live? I cannot go on like this—I shall go mad. I implore you to let me put an end to all; why do you make me go on living when there is nothing for me but suffering?

'"If I were bound to a man I loved, I should not complain, whatever indignity he put upon me. He might be vicious and a spendthrift, he might beat me and jump on me, I should not care. I should forgive him all, provided I loved him. But to be bound to a man who bores you, and who yet never gives you cause for complaint! More exquisite torture was not suffered by Tantalus! Sometimes, when he is especially kind, all the tiger in me rises, and I feel inclined to scream at him: 'Don't you understand—won't you understand—that you are utterly obnoxious to me? Why don't you strike me? Why don't you knock me senseless, and kick me? I should not hate you so much then.'"

'Then I, Gerald Manly, the cynic and pessimist, strove with her for her life! I made her

preserve it a little longer—only a little longer, not foreseeing it was only for you, Jack! I—though every stab her husband unconsciously gave her pierced *me* and hurt *me!* I—who hated this very worst of all possible worlds, and laughed at all the works that man attributes to an imaginary Maker—the personalized externalization of an inner superstitious emotion; the mere personification of an incomprehensible Infinite, like the Tortoise of Hindoo mythology, on whose final back is borne the burden of the chain of animals, the topmost one of which is the elephant, on whom presses the weight of the world. I! whose every argument in favour of life was forced and insincere; for I knew that, for her, life without that love which she could not have was at best something to be tolerated—as it is, indeed, for most of us, for we are only forcibly kept alive by a Will-to-live, of the action of which we are unconscious, and yet which is absolute master of us.

'Well, I strove with her for her life, and I made her preserve it. That was a year ago. Now, just try and realize it; just try and imagine what the following months must have been to her after she had been driven to utter those heart-rending cries of revolt, of despair! Things grew steadily worse and worse, for every day he seemed to grow fonder and fonder of her. Do you wonder

that at last an insidious thought came creeping into the minds of both of us?

'Gradually, gradually that thought ripened; though after we had first dared to speak of it, we rejected and returned to it a thousand times. We never really realized that we meant it seriously; we never really believed it would ever become an accomplished fact. For a long time it was merely an idea, to play with which afforded us a certain amount of relief.

'But if you don't want such ideas to become the master of you, you must strongly resist their first approaches. Once the germ is within you it takes root and grows and grows, till it has subordinated your whole being to itself. Thus it came to pass that one day she cried:

'"Rid me of him, and I shall be yours. My dream of a great rapture can never come to pass, yet your companionship has been a great comfort to me, my dearest friend. With you, Gerald, I shall have a calm happiness. Only release me from this hell! It must be done so that nobody shall suspect, and after a year we can marry, and people will be ready to congratulate us. You shall have that golden time of which you speak, and I—I shall be content."

'Rid her of him! I was quite ready. But let not that vulgar word "murder" come into your mind. Leave that for the crude-minded mob that

has no eye but for the outward manifestations of conduct. To you who are capable of appreciating the fine inwardness that may lie behind an apparently criminal action—who are capable of understanding the long subtle working of temperament on temperament, and the slow evolution of circumstance therefrom, without being blinded to all of it by the glare of the final explosion—to you I say this was no mere melodramatic murder, no mere conventional stage-horror. It was not the tawdry lime-light tragedy it might appear to the vulgar vision, but a tragedy of hearts that had bled and suffered unspeakably.

'It is difficult to apply sweeping laws to human existence; it is impossible to apply sweeping criticism to human conduct. Every set of circumstances must be considered by itself, and makes new laws unto itself. Mentally, the mere putting an end to the consciousness of a human animal—especially if there be ground and justification for it—has never been to me anything very dreadful, and certainly nothing more dreadful than the slaying of any other animal, be it a fly, or cockroach, or serpent, or sheep. Not that I want to argue away that tendency which exists in man to shrink from killing another of the same species—except when, enslaved by traditions from savage times, he marches to war against his neighbour. But this tendency had been deadened in me as

regards the particular man. And then, you must remember I am familiar with death.

'Would the world be the poorer for the loss of this Robert Ashfield, this nonentity, with his smug self-complacency, to whom was given the best that the earth had to offer—wealth, power, and all the desire of his eyes and heart? He differed not an iota from thousands of his fellows, and his place could easily be filled by any of them. Those men he employed would still continue in the same duties; those plantations that were his would still bear their annual crop. He would simply enter into everlasting unconsciousness, and Nellie would be released from her hell!

'But how was our desire to be accomplished? Every suggestion seemed fraught with terrible danger. Our chance came at last, however, and between us we devised a scheme, which, brilliant as it already was, was helped by fortuitous circumstances to become one of the most successful in the whole history of so-called crime. If I have had nothing else out of life, it has at least furnished me with amusement. I certainly never expected to set all England making itself ridiculous for my special delectation.

'When a mystery like this occurs, those whose business it is to investigate it are bound to note every possible fact and circumstance that appears to have any connection with it. Now, under the

fierce search-light thrown on any particular case, a great many facts must necessarily come to light which have really no bearing upon it, but amid which are scattered the facts which are of its essence. The whole difficulty lies in separating the latter from the merely accidental, yet concomitant, facts which cross and recross them, run side by side, twist and turn, suggest connections, and lead one on until one is brought to a dead stop for apparently want of a link. Every additional concomitant fact may so affect the apparent significance of all the other facts as to introduce a multitude of new complications and difficulties. Suspicion may thus be thrown on the innocent, and herein lies the danger of merely circumstantial evidence.

'In the present case nobody succeeded in the correct sifting of the facts, and the poor public had to swallow the chaff with the wheat.

'Now, the facts ascertained by Warlock-Jones over and above those that came out at the inquest were true enough, but they all had nothing to do with the mystery, being purely of the accidental and concomitant class. Cyrus Ashfield *was* at Dover; he *did* have interviews with Barham the aëronaut, who, in his turn, *did* talk to the gate-keeper, who *did* have reason for being uneasy at the coroner's questions. Moreover, an empty balloon *was* seen over the North Sea. Warlock-Jones has been breaking his head to connect all

these circumstances, and construct a plausible theory. I, who knew he was on the wrong track, took the very simple course of having a frank talk with all these men.

'Warlock-Jones, being a detective, could not go straightforwardly to work. He must walk round and round the suspected persons with circumspection; he fears they may get wind of their being watched. I boldly walk up to them, as he could have done any time. The truth is very simple. Barham is a professional aëronaut and parachutist in the summer. He earns large amounts by exhibitions of his daring under a well-known professional name. In the winter he puts out his money at interest. The poor porter is in his debt, and has his home mortgaged to him; hence his uneasiness. He did not want the fact to come out. Warlock-Jones was quick to note the man had something to conceal, and equally quick to draw wrong conclusions from it.

'Barham also advertises under another name. He figures as a benevolent gentleman, a retired member of a great firm, with unlimited cash at his disposal which he is anxious to lend to anybody who will only take the trouble to apply, at five per cent. interest. He makes no inquiries, charges no preliminary fees, and asks for no security. He further enjoins all borrowers to beware of moneylenders.

'Cyrus Ashfield was pressed by his creditors, for, as he told me, he has struggled all his life without capital. The reason of his presence at Dover, whence he had come after an interchange of letters with Barham, was his desire to avail himself of that gentleman's benevolence, with which he was happily enabled to dispense by his brother's decease. Elias, poor chap! has, I am afraid, been fearfully maligned. Cyrus has simply been good to him.

'The fugitive balloon, as you will now see, was a mere detached circumstance. In his determination to drag it in, Warlock-Jones would have made the wind blow all sorts of ways at once. On the night in question it was blowing from the west, right across the Atlantic. How a balloon could have got from Dover to London in the teeth of it is not quite clear. Balloons—grappling-hooks—eagles—cyclones—motor-cars—twins—triplets brothers changing places for mysterious motives—the sea above the sky—all bosh!

'There was one fact, however, that was duly noticed by the coroner, which had a great deal to do with the case, and which was nevertheless dismissed both by him and by Warlock-Jones as insignificant. I refer to the absence of the key of your studio back-door. That door during your illness was never used. It used to be locked from the inside and the key left in the lock. When at

the inquest you said you might have taken that key with you, although you didn't think you had, the point was not pursued further. I admit it appeared to be quite irrelevant.

'Now, whilst I was attending on you, it occurred to me, in view of future possibilities, that the studio would be a good place to have access to during your absence, and so, wandering about one day, while you were in bed, I quietly put the key in my pocket. As the sequel showed, you never missed it. Our plan had not then been thought of. You will remember you resisted my advice that you should go abroad, on the ground that such a trip would make too great a call on your slender resources; and, also, that almost immediately after, you sold a small landscape. Nellie was the buyer, through my instrumentality. This transaction had curious results, for, although I induced Nellie to buy it for your sake only, the fact of her possessing a picture of yours aided me materially in carrying out our scheme. I also count it as the beginning of that chain of consequences—unforeseen by me—which has culminated in the present tragedy!

'Immediately after you had left London our chance came! Robert Ashfield announced to Nellie his intention of making the journey to Ostend, and immediately our inspiration came to us. Recollect we had both been wrought up to a

pitch when the carrying through of our design had become to us an imperative duty. Duty, I say! Mark the word well. We were both original people, and we refused to be bound by the same canons that rule for the stupid masses. But we had to go to work cautiously, having our own selves to protect against the same stupid majority.

'The picture bought for a purely worthy purpose, and the key I had pocketed with only a vague idea in my head that it might somehow be of use, now both came in splendidly. There was one more tool I wanted, and that Nellie readily supplied—a love-letter to you, her dearest Clinton, purporting to be written on the Wednesday, and couched in the most extravagant terms of endearment. It announced that her husband had left that morning for Ostend, and that she would be at your studio at half-past nine. Till then she was so impatient, but she would have to content herself in the meanwhile with that bit of you you had put into the landscape your dear hands had painted. What a joy that picture had been to her! I am sorry I destroyed that letter, as I should now have liked to make you a present of so prophetic a document!

'To proceed. *Ashfield at no time had any idea of taking Nellie with him.* He knew she was a bad sailor, and, besides, he was far too nervous about her to take her across at so stormy

a season. When he left home on the Wednesday morning, the arrangement was that she was to pack up just a valise for him, and send it with his rug and dressing-case direct to Cannon Street Station, by one of the servants, who was to meet him there.

'Whiting and I had some partnership business that required looking into, and I represented to him that, as I wanted to go to the City that day to see my lawyer on some private business of my own, I might make a day of it, and get everything cleared off. To this he agreed.

'I made it a point to go down to the City by the same train as Ashfield, and to get into the same carriage with him. He was pleased to have my company, and we chatted together quite gaily. Now, my whole idea in this was to get him to tell me of his trip to Ostend, which I wasn't supposed to know about, and to think of something or other he might have forgotten to tell Nellie to pack. I led the conversation insidiously, lamenting my own tendency to forget little essential things when preparing to travel, and saying how annoyed I always got at remembering them just when it was too late.

'"I wager now, Ashfield," said I, "there's something you've forgotten."

'He didn't think so at first, but at last he said:

'"I'm sure I told Nellie to put in the new Krupp razor, but I shouldn't be surprised if she

doesn't. I'll just send her a wire about it from the City."

'"Don't trouble to do that, Ashfield," said I; "I'm only going to the City for a couple of hours. I'll look in on Mrs. Ashfield when I get back, and deliver the message. I'll ask her to show me the razor, so that there's no mistake."

'Now, you must understand that my plan required me not to leave the City; but, in thus undertaking to deliver his message to Nellie, I had two purposes. First, it was essential, when I saw him again in the evening, that he should fully believe I had been to his house in the meanwhile; and, secondly, it was important I should prevent *him* sending the telegram, for he might so word it as to give away the fact that Nellie was not going with him.

'The telegram she showed at the inquest purporting to come from him was sent by me, and I so worded it as to make it corroborate her pretence that she was to accompany him, and thus contradict any chance word he may have let slip to the contrary. The casual remark Ashfield made to his clerk during the day about his having sent Nellie a "message" will now become clear to you. He thought, of course, that I had delivered it in person.

'I took care to send the telegram whilst he was out at his lunch—for I watched him go to his

usual restaurant—and I handed it in among a crowd of people, for the Eastcheap office is a feverishly busy one.

'In the meanwhile, Nellie not only made up the hand-luggage her husband wanted, but also packed two valises for herself, besides the small trunk to be registered as passengers' luggage, and the rug, with umbrella and walking-cane tied with a strap. All these she took with her in the cab, and let the porter wheel them in, telling him to let them wait on the trolley, as she could not take the tickets and have the trunk registered until her husband arrived. This was, of course, in anticipation of the story she was to tell at the inquest. Not that such minute inquiries were likely to be made among the porters, but we had to provide against every contingency. After a little I met her at an agreed part of the station—the thick fog helped to do away with various little dangers—and we exchanged just a few words; for, as it was now too late to draw back, she needed nerving for the accomplishment of her part. She then went to the booking-office, took two first-class tickets—paying with two five-pound notes her husband had given her the day before, and which might therefore have just been handed her by him—and had the trunk registered.

'As it would have been dangerous not to admit at the inquest that she had attended to this

part herself, she had to introduce the invention that her husband in the meanwhile was getting a hasty wash and brush-up. As you will see presently, I was able later on to give her the necessary points to make her story agree with that told by Ashfield's clerks, and, as there were things she could to all appearance not have known unless her husband *had* met her at Cannon Street, it never occurred to anybody to question her statements. The trunk, once registered, passed out of her hands, and, as it was yet early, she got a porter to put the small things in the train, took note of the compartment, and, giving the man a tip, she said casually:

'"I will just go and meet my husband as he comes through the barrier."

'The porter went off the platform, and Nellie, after walking up and down a little, quietly took possession of her seat. This part she told me afterwards.

'Of course you understand now that Ashfield never left London at all. I intercepted him, laying a heavy hand on his shoulder. He vowed I had startled him.

'"I thought you had gone back home," he went on.

'"I *have* been back home—to *your* home," said I.

'"What do you mean?" he asked.

'"You must come at once with me, Ashfield," I answered solemnly. "I speak as a friend."

'"Nonsense, man!" said he; "you're joking. I'm all in a rush. William is here with my things, and I've just time to snatch a mouthful of food at the buffet. Have only just got away from the office—feel all sticky—couldn't even get a wash—tremendous rush of business at the last moment—the clerks all losing their heads and everything going wrong—and I haven't swallowed a crumb since two o'clock."

'"Very well," said I; "you know me, Ashfield, and I'm not the sort of man to indulge in practical jokes. I went to deliver your message to your wife, and, as it turns out, it was a Providence that you entrusted me with it. I am only just in time to save your household from a great calamity. Will you do me the honour to believe that I am speaking in all seriousness?"

'These words produced their effect, and I had Nellie's love-letter to you ready to follow it up with, inventing some cock-and-bull story to account for my possession of it. As I watched him read it, I felt that at least some of the stabs he had inflicted on Nellie were being repaid. Indeed, for a moment I began to think that the letter would suffice of itself to finish the work I had cut out for myself. I had no need to say much more. He became immediately as helplessly docile as a child, and put himself entirely into my hands. I hurried him off, viâ the Metropolitan Railway, to Marlborough Street Station, saying William would go home after waiting a little, and that he could give out he had changed his mind on account of the weather. At Marlborough Street we passed out with a crowd of other people, and plunged into the terrible fog. My work was easy.

'"She is to come, as you have read, to his studio at half-past nine," I began.

'"Let us hurry, let us hurry, for God's sake! I always thought she hung about that picture a good deal too much. I never saw anything to admire in the damned smudge!"

'Not a soul saw us enter the alley. But, as I unlocked your back-door, he seemed to hesitate.

'"But why do you take this sudden interest in my affairs?" he asked.

'"Because," said I, "my sister's happiness is at stake."

'"Ah, yes, the blackguard was to marry her!" said he.

'"No, not blackguard," said I; "let us not be too harsh towards a fellow-creature. With God's help we shall save both—unstained."

'He groaned in anguish as he stepped in after me, and I carefully locked the door again.

'How ironically prophetic some of these details seem now!

'"No doubt he has gone to meet her and escort her through the fog. They will be here soon," said I; "what a splendid place he has here for that sort of thing!"

'I stood enjoying the exquisite torture my words were inflicting on him. It was my intention, big, powerful man as I am, to first stun him, and then open an artery so that he should bleed to death. Of course, I meant to make sure of my work. He would lie in the studio, I reckoned, for two or three months, till your return, by which time he would have become unrecognisable. Ashfield being supposed to have been lost at sea, none of his relatives would even think of coming forward to look at this particular body, and the matter would end there and then. True, I had no thought of the possibility of the tailor's mark on the clothing leading to his identification, but this was an immaterial oversight on my part. Given sufficient time, even the tailor's mark would have been of no help.

'Of course, I dared not hesitate now, with Nellie doing her part independently, and my statements having inextricably involved us both.

'"Let us cross the studio. There is a little room on the other side, where we can wait till they come, and, as soon as they strike a light, we

shall show ourselves," said I, by way of plausible suggestion, and knowing, too, that that part of the place was furthest removed from human ears.

'The bald facts I must now set down in cold blood will disgust you, for now they disgust even me. I shall not attempt to soften them by trying to make you realize the hot blood in which the actual deed was carried through—the culminating frenzy of two years of suppressed ferment.

'As soon as we were in the bath-room, I seized him by the throat, lifted him in the air, and dashed him to the ground with tremendous force. His head struck the edge of the bath. He lay there, groaning, and certainly some of the blood that was attributed to your cut feet came from his wound. I lit a tiny jet of gas, for I wanted a little light to finish by, and I then became aware that the bath was almost full of water. In the hurry of departure your man had forgotten to pull out the plug. I laughed aloud at the grim thought that now came to me.

'"You were to have been drowned," said I. "By Jove, you shall be!"

'But his senses had not quite gone.

'"What have I done to you, Manly?" he whimpered. "Let me go—only let me go, and I promise I shall forgive you. Do not fear to trust me. Oh, let me go, let me go!"

'I seized him round the waist with both my

arms, taking care to keep the wound as far from me as possible. He clasped his hands in entreaty, murmuring again :

'"What have I done to you? What have I done to you?"

'But I disregarded his prayers—I remembered Nellie's anguish—and put him in the bath, holding him under. Even his last frenzy of strength was nothing against mine. All was soon over.

'But I would not leave him there. "I must not give poor Jack a fright when, perhaps travel-stained, he comes in here first thing for a bath." So, having removed his pocket-book and ascertained that there were no other papers on him save those contained in it, I carried him to the back, and laid him on the ground, and arranged him a bit artistically—"as he might lie at the bottom of the Channel," was another prophetically grotesque thought of mine. Then I returned to the bath-room, pulled the plug and let the water run out—for it was tinted red—and extinguished the gas. I carefully drew the hanging, to cut off the back part from the studio, unlocked the back door, carefully pulled the lid over the inside key-hole so that no eye might pry in, and locked it again from the outside. I then went home as usual—even taking his walking-cane with me—and arrived a little after ten. I was wet, and got even wetter from the rain that began to fall, but I

had avoided getting any blood on me. The walking-cane, the key, and the pocket-book with its contents — bank-notes and papers—and also Nellie's letter, I immediately destroyed. I then waited developments.

'I was a bit anxious about Nellie. Her part, though easy, required considerable nerve and presence of mind, but she carried it through all right, successfully getting Ashfield's things on board and leaving them there. She had even been careful to take a walking-cane as nearly as possible like the one I took from him, and she had not let the servants notice she had taken it. A small point, you will say, but we had to be thorough, and we had given so much thought to the scheme that we left nothing overlooked.

'As soon as Nellie got back to her house, she sent for me, as the family doctor, and then we arranged the story she was to tell at the inquest. The few words her husband had let drop about his hurry, and his not having dined, or even washed, proved valuable. Her story of her meeting him at Cannon Street tallied on every point with the clerk's account of his departure from the office. She confessed to me she had felt a bit nervous on the quay at Dover, but it was really without cause, as it could never have been brought home to her that she had travelled alone. It was a dark night, and she managed to

pass on board with the crowd. A gentleman, too, handed her things down for her to the porter, and he could never possibly imagine that the lady who had sat next to him in a full compartment was just the one whose husband was supposed to have been lost. Moreover, it was known at the office that Ashfield *was* going to Ostend; he managed to convey the impression to his clerks, by that casual utterance of his about the "message," that Nellie *was* to cross with him, a fact which the telegram seemed to corroborate, and he left the office with the direct purpose of catching the Dover boat train. There was therefore nothing in Nellie's statements to arouse suspicion, and they were accepted unreservedly by everybody. That part of the business worked splendidly.

'But you will be saying, What about Thomas Burnside Porter, Esq., who talked and smoked with Ashfield on deck? Well, I must confess he was certainly a valuable, though a quite unexpected, ally. By this I don't mean to suggest he was a conscious liar, but that, like the most veracious of beings, he was merely the dupe of his psychology. To illustrate my meaning: Some time back a slight earthquake shock passed through England. Most people only heard about it from their newspapers, but all the same they were immediately quite certain that they had been

awakened by it at night, and that their beds had rocked violently. And this in districts which it was known to have left unaffected! Such is the human mind. Such is the power of imagination!

'I once met this fellow, Porter, when I was in the City some months ago and lunched at that Eastcheap restaurant. He was a very breezy chap indeed, with a jolly falsetto voice, and bubbled over with brag and anecdotes of his personal adventures and doings. Ashfield used to play chess with him quite a lot, though they were both awful duffers at the game. Ashfield, as a rule, used to get the worst of it, and I think his great ambition was to be able to beat Porter. Now, however reticent Ashfield might have been at his office about his domestic matters, he was certainly fond of talking to a select circle who played chess with him of his happiness, and his pride in his fine home, and his good wife, and his two boys out in Ceylon, whom he was going to see in the spring.

'Now, Porter, as we know, crossed that night on the Ostend boat. When he learnt about the St. John's Wood Wonder, and that Ashfield had been swept off the very boat, a man of that type could not help imagining and believing the cock-and-bull story he told at the inquest. As a matter of fact, the mental leap from the actual facts as he first heard them to the story he told was a very

slight one, and even a person of steadier mental balance than he might easily have been tricked by his imagination playing round the two facts: (1) That he really did know Ashfield very well; (2) that this wonderful mystery began on the very boat. Moreover, it is easy to understand that the glory, not only of being a sort of friend of Ashfield's, but also of being the last person to converse with him, was too great a temptation to be resisted, and must have very speedily completed the self-delusion. Of course, he put into Ashfield's mouth all the things Ashfield used to say at the restaurant. We know he told the coroner he had been talking with some gentlemen at his hotel about his unexpected encounter with Ashfield on the boat just before the latter was swept away, and they said he must write to the coroner. Of course, he was indulging in his usual habit of brag, quite cocky at being the hero of a group. This, we see, resulted in his eventual appearance at the inquest. And long before that time, I have no doubt, he really and sincerely believed what he related. But I saw through the man directly Nellie told me about him.

'The rest of the things that made up the mystery were purely accidental, but were distinctly dramatic in their appropriateness to the occasion. The fall of the top-light was of course entirely due to the storm, and would have occurred in any case. The tremendous pressure of the wind and the crash of the chimney-pots and tiles from neighbour Jones's roof were quite sufficient to do the mischief. Your pulling Ashfield's body out of the débris—you entered not very long after I left—made it impossible for anybody to discover he had never fallen through your top-light at all; and, indeed, nobody suspected that he hadn't! Your version of the terrific crash seemed to hypnotize everybody.

'The sea-water in the stomach was the biggest farce of all. Of course, I understood it as soon as I heard of it. You will remember that, when you persistently refused to leave England, I recommended you, as the next best thing I could think of, to try a hot bath every morning, with an artificial sea-salt added. And they did you so much good that I made you promise to take regular hot sea-water baths during your holiday. On the Wednesday morning you must have put in all you had left for your last bath before leaving, so that the solution was pretty strong. No wonder those doctors and Fellows of the Royal Society found "saline constituents" in Ashfield's stomach, and had to cudgel their brains over so truly extraordinary a phenomenon.

'So may circumstantial evidence absolutely testify to a miracle.

'Of course, Nellie thought it best to pretend to

identify her husband, as everybody else would be certain to do so. But she was terribly taken aback at this unexpectedly rapid discovery of the body. Anyhow, I managed to put her at her ease as soon as I got to her.

'The overcoat was a purely insignificant fact. No doubt Ashfield had it made at some new, unfashionable tailor's, and then removed the strip containing the name.

'And whilst this mystery rage was on, you may imagine how I was amused. Do you ask if I had any remorse? So far as the deed itself is concerned, I have never suffered from remorse. Did Napoleon suffer from it? Did Wellington? Did Nelson? No; these murderers on a great scale were fêted and honoured. And shall I, to whom man is less than it was to them, be branded because I destroy but one? Let not the mob talk of murder, the mob that feeds on slaughtered carcases, and glorifies those that kill by the thousand!

'The only thing I do regret is my intense satisfaction at the time. I feel my thoughts might have been gentler, and, though his death was a very quick one, it would have been even a less disagreeable one had I not been fascinated by the grim humour of my sudden thought. But then we should scarcely have had our mystery.

'In the height of my enjoyment of the mystery,

I wrote that famous letter to the *Daily Gazette*, under the signature of 'Veritas.' If the editor had not been so blinded, he would have seen it was from the pen of a psychologist, writing with his tongue in his cheek. The sea above the sky! How easy it is to set up as a prophet and teach a new religion! Oh, the stupid mob!

'As will now be clear to you, my laughter was not fated to continue for long. Even Warlock-Jones's exhibition of conjuring tricks—and of himself—was no compensation for the change in the position that followed directly on your return. How could I foresee that you were to rob me of my Nellie?—you, with your soft voice and soft manners, and your cultivation of the beautiful, and your ruddy-brown curly locks, and your delightful cloak and sombrero — you, with that childlike dreaminess of yours that women love. You don't mind my chaffing you a little, old chap; it's the last opportunity I shall ever have.

'Nellie was a noble creature throughout. I tell you, Jack, she was good through and through. She was perfectly frank with me; she implored me to release her from her promise; she told me how she loved you. I knew all about your cooling towards Ethelyn from the beginning; she scorned to deceive me even for one moment. If she concealed the past from you, it was only because she wished to begin a new page of exist-

ence, and she feared to lose you. She wanted the great happiness that had been the dream of her life. Yes, hers was a little body, but the passion in it was grand—was infinite.

'Under the influence your personality exerted on her, she tried to cast off all that I had been at such pains to teach her. She began to be attracted again by the colour and warmth of all those damned superstitions. "Since this new great love has come to me," she wrote, "I have begun to look at things afresh. He has been an inspiration to me, and once more do I feel the Divine in all things—the Divine which you had taken out of my universe."

'"Your philosophy has become too cold for me," she cried another time. "It freezes me—it freezes me!" That is the worst of women! They are so entirely the creatures of their emotions.

'Dear old fellow, you never imagined what you were making me suffer; but I never bore you any ill-will for it—except, perhaps, for one moment, which I afterwards repented. I am a sane, clear thinker, and I saw through the position, and understood it perfectly, even from your point of view.

'Nellie also suffered terribly, for she had grown to love Ethelyn, and would not wittingly have done her an injury. You see how complicated

the cursed position had become for all of us. Dear Ethelyn alone has never suspected anything at all! It depends on you that she never shall!

'Of course, Nellie was too exceptional a woman not to sympathize with my point of view; but, as she pointed out, our minds no longer accorded, so that even my companionship did not mean the same to her as before. Moreover, her passion for you was so much stronger than herself, that any attempt at battle was hopeless from the beginning.

'Well, she and I had at least one enjoyable evening—I mean the one we all passed together at her house with Warlock-Jones as the special guest. How she and I put him through his paces then! Despite her oppression, Nellie's sense of humour and her love of fun were awake all through. How deliciously she took Warlock-Jones in hand, defying his investigation, and making him take us all into his confidence!

'But I saw that the fun and everything else must end as soon as I learnt you two had declared yourselves—for she wrote to me all about it at Dover. It is not because you were taking Nellie from me that I have decided on this tragedy. It is for Ethelyn's sake only that Nellie and I are ending our lives. The unhappiness that threatened her could not be allowed to fall, for she is very dear to us. And, surely, she deserves

happiness more than any of us others. Better let her bear the pain of my loss now than allow her whole existence to be spoiled! I have thought it well over, and this morning I brought Nellie to agree with me. She has found strength at last to sacrifice herself!

'She, dear woman, was dramatic to the end. Ethelyn's hand must bring her, she insisted, the pretended narcotic I was to prepare for her sleeplessness. That would enable her, too, to have a last talk with Ethelyn. All a plot, you see. I shall be called there to-morrow and shall discover I have, by mistake, made up a fatal dose. This is going to prey on my mind, and I—you may guess. But I shall have thus had a last sight of her. I hope to find her looking at peace, for by her death she will have done a good deed. If there were a heaven, that deed alone would ensure it for her.

'To-morrow—ere you receive this—I shall face extinction. I shall watch the minute-hand revolving through the seconds towards the appointed time, and see my life passing—passing away. But the great mystery will not torture me, because I know that I shall be resolved into raw dust that shall revivify again and again to all eternity, even as it has endlessly risen into animation and subsided again in the epochs that have passed.

'And yet I feel it a comfort to know that at least two people who were dear to me will think of me sometimes, and will let fall a tear for me—to know that you, who loved me, will judge me by all you know of me, and not by this or that individual action.

'My will has long since been made. Of course, all my savings go to Ethelyn. Dear chap, cherish her and make her happy. She deserves it—a sincerer girl never breathed.

'Good-bye, dear old fellow, and good luck to both of you. Do your utmost to help her bear this blow, and once again let me repeat: "Cherish her and make her happy!"

'GERALD.'

The tears were streaming from Clinton's eyes. He let the sheets drop, and fell on his knees in obedience to the prompting of some imperative instinct he did not stay to question. Though his lips moved not, all his soul went forth in a full outpouring of prayer, while his blinded eyes renewed their flood in sympathy. He had never known it was in him to cry like that.

'O Lord, Thou, who knowest all, wilt pardon all. I, who loved him and knew him from his childhood, do on my knees acknowledge Thy mercy and loving-kindness, knowing Thou wilt not judge him in anger when his spirit cometh

before Thee. Thou didst make him a little cleverer than us other men; and vanity, that human weakness, blinding him to his presumption, he did seek with his mind to look beyond the reach of man's reason, which, could it understand its own nature, would be higher than itself. As well might a hollow sphere turn itself inside out! No, our reason is baffled in deliberate exploration; yet are the mysterious recesses lighted up for us at moments by Divine flashes. Our spirits feel and hold the Truth, which is denied to our mere reason; but human speech is not adequate for the expression thereof.

'Yet was Gerald's heart wholly good and true, wholly unselfish. When he was but a lad his soul was tortured by all the suffering he saw in the world—the suffering of man and beast, of fish, bird and insect. The principle of enmity he perceived in the universe, the war of species against species, and of individual against individual, tore him with anguish, and the sight of a fellow-man in need hurt him sore. His spirit became scarred and gashed and twisted and broken. Then did he deny Thee and mock at Thy works. Gall was mixed with his thought and speech. Nevertheless, O Lord, did his heart remain sound and true, though he made pretence of paying no heed to it. But 'twas because his heart far surpassed in goodness the hearts of

other men—yea, of other men that worship Thee—that he became thus embittered, that he was led to deny and blaspheme Thee. His spirit knew no rest; it was doomed to unhappiness from the beginning. I, too, have caused him to suffer. Forgive me, O Lord, even as *he* hath forgiven me; make me strong of soul, and pure of spirit, so that I may be worthy of the charge he hath enjoined upon me—to cherish and protect his sister, that sweet and true woman who was the light of his eyes. Forgive me my transgression against her, even as she would forgive me did she but know; and grant that I may never, even unwittingly, hurt her in aught.

'For myself alone do I supplicate Thee, O Lord, for I have wantonly offended—I who have always seen Thy Spirit in the universe, in the magic quality of a landscape, in the smile of a beautiful woman, in the blue of a summer sky, in the laughter of sunlit waters, in the gift of song and speech, of music and art and letters, in the flight of a bird that soars, in the poignant joy of life of the young of every species, in the love and loving-kindness whose germ at least is in the veriest brutish beast.

'But in this my prayer for Gerald, do I but acknowledge Thy mercy, for by that knowledge of Thee which is in my spirit am I certain that Thou wilt heal all his wounds and hurt, even

though he hath mocked and blasphemed Thee. He, who redeemed so many lives, will, of a surety, be pardoned that he did take one. He hath died young and world-weary, and what he suffered we who remain behind can but dimly realize.

'Nellie, too, O Lord, I know Thou wilt pardon. If my love for her was sin, her love for me was no sin, and by it, as she hath herself declared, were her thoughts turned once more to Thee. Thou wilt soothe her tired spirit, and give her peace and rest, for she, too, O Lord, was noble and good.

'Grant Ethelyn and me strength, O Lord, that we may both bear that which hath now befallen us.

'Thou, Lord, who knowest all, wilt pardon all!'

He rose to his feet and picked up the sheets with a choking sensation at his throat. No, he would not glance at them again; he put them into the very heart of the fire.

He was prepared for the knocking and ringing that came just then, and the servant's ghastly face and breathless words:

'Come, come at once! Master has blown his brains out!'

CHAPTER XIX.

HAND-IN-HAND they came silently down the stairs, Ethelyn and Clinton, as though fearful of disturbing the hushed feeling of death that had settled over the house.

His prayer seemed to have been answered, for Ethelyn had not made his task heavier by any hysterical outbreak. Her heroic resignation was such that he scarce dared turn his eyes towards her, for fear he should read in her face all that she was suppressing. He put his arm round her gently as they entered the room.

'I have nobody now but you, dearest,' she whispered brokenly.

'I hope I shall prove worthy of you,' he whispered back.

Her face fell forward on to his shoulder.

'Tell me, dearest,' she said, after a long pause, 'what was in that note I brought you from poor Nellie. I did want to know very much. May I not ask you now?'

'It was nothing—just a joke of hers,' he replied. 'She only said you were a dear girl, and that she loved you even better than—I did!'

'Ah, but then she never knew, of course, how much that was—how could anyone but ourselves? But I think she must have really believed what she wrote. Last night, when I said good-bye, she kissed me again and again. She said I had made her quite happy that evening. I nearly cried as I left her; she somehow made me feel her life must have been so unhappy. Poor Nellie! I was hoping she would sleep well. She did—sleep!'

'Poor Nellie!' repeated Clinton, and his face was ghastly white.

THE END.

BILLING AND SONS, PRINTERS, GUILDFORD.

Maud Muller

"It Might Have Been."

Her Joy was Duty
And Love was Law.

For one of the brightest poetic gems. P.T.O.